Reappraising Gupta History
for S.R.Goyal

B.Ch. Chhabra
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P.K. Agrawala
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for S.R. Goyal

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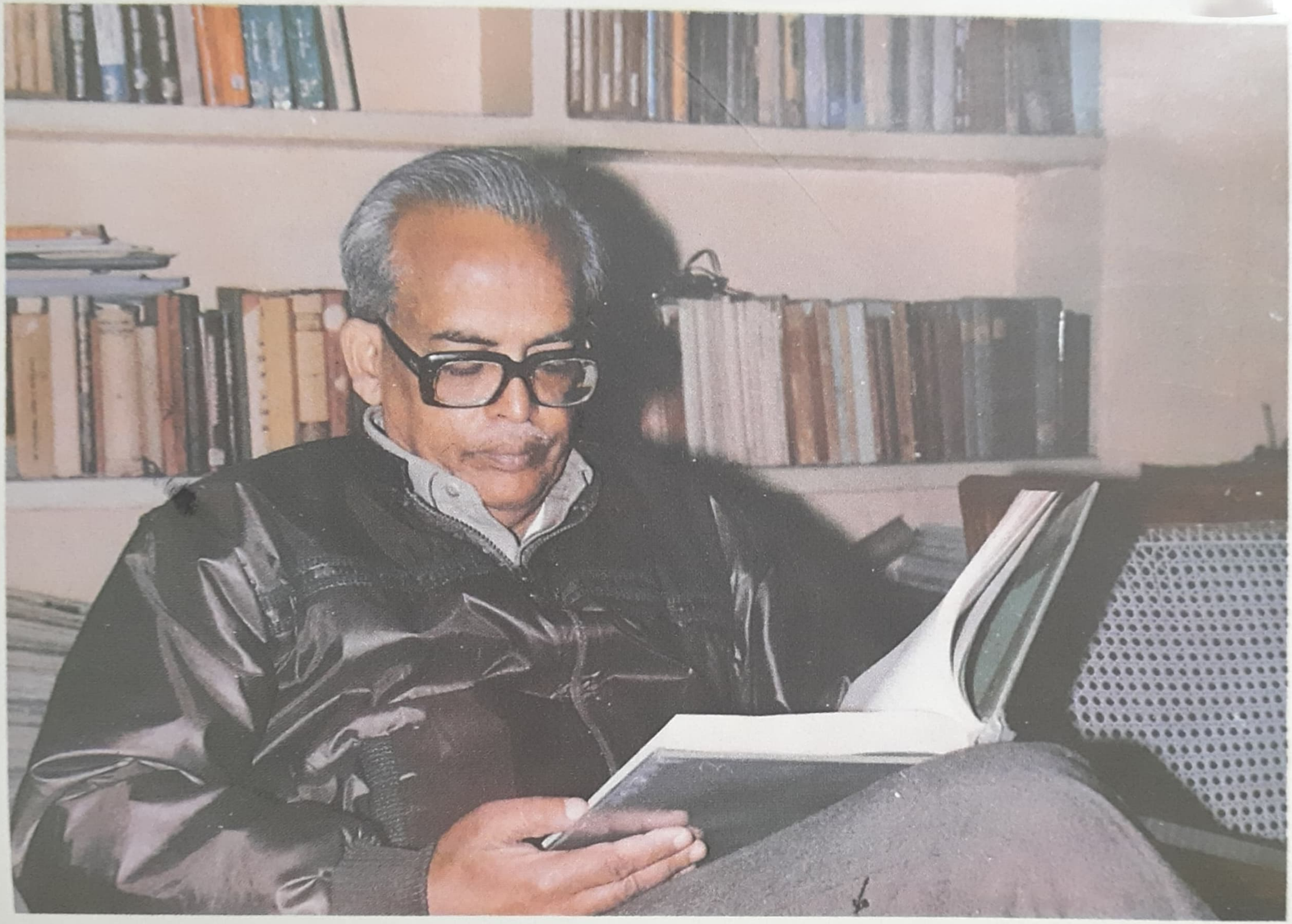

Professor S.R. Goyal

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Editors

B.Ch. Chhabra
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Shankar Goyal

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EDITORIAL

This Felicitation Volume is a bouquet of variagated flowers, so to say, offered to Professor Shri Ram Goyal by his admirers, associates and friends in the form of research articles on different subjects concerning Gupta history, his special field of interest, research and writings. This bouquet will remain ever fresh, specially for the scholars and students devoted to the history of the Gupta age.

The age of the Imperial Guptas was the Golden or Classical Age of Indian history. The classicism of the period finds reflection in literature, inscriptions as well as the coinage of the Gupta dynasty. Archaeologists have discovered numerous hoards of gold coins, belonging to the Gupta kings. This way also their period was the golden age of Indian history.

Dr. S.R.Goyal has written much on the history of the Gupta age and that too lucidly and with profound originality. His contribution to the reconstruction of the political history of the Gupta dynasty is now recognised throughout the Indological world. Similarly, his factorial approach to the history of this period has been widely commended and appreciated. His volume on Gupta inscriptions is also marked by thoroughness, meticulousness and originality.

Another point which goes to his credit is that he has been writing quite a lot in Hindi also. The earliest writers on Indian history were German and French. Later on, in the British period, mostly English writers undertook this job. When Indian writers entered the field, they also used the English language. Nowadays Hindi is encouraged so that most of the Indians can read it. Professor Goyal is fulfilling this *desideratum* admirably. He deserves all praise and appreciation from fellow historians. The present volume is only a symbol of their sentiments towards him.

The first five essays collected in this volume throw light on the modern historiography of the Gupta age and the contribution of Professor Goyal to Gupta studies while the rest are concerned with various aspects of the political and cultural history of the period. It is neither necessary nor useful to assess what these writings add upto. The articles collected here will probably evoke different reactions in different minds, but certain it is that they will generate fresh interest in the problems touched in them.

I thank the authors of these articles for their valuable contributions and apologize to many others who might have wished to write but have not been able for one reason or the other.

B.Ch.Chhabra

EDITORIAL PREFACE

Some time ago when some scholars, friends and admirers of Professor S.R. Goyal resolved to honour him with a thematic festschrift on Gupta history, which he so richly deserves, being the foremost historian of the recent decades on this subject, it was decided that as far as possible the presentation of the volume to him should take place some time during his sixtieth year. The editoral board constituted for this purpose was headed by Professor K.D. Bajpai, while Professor B.Ch. Chhabra, one of the greatest living authorities on Gupta inscriptions and a Sanskritist of repute, agreed to be its chief editor with Dr. P.K. Agrawala, Dr. Ashvini Agrawal and myself as other editors. The editorial board entrusted me the task of getting in touch with eminent historians interested in Gupta history, obtaining papers from them and rendering whatever humble help I could do to the editors in editing the work. The time at my disposal was not enough, but by the grace of God and help and guidance from Professor Chhabra I could manage to accomplish the task entrusted to me, hopefully with some success.

Thus, the present volume is the outcome of the earnest desire of numerous scholars, including some from other countries, to felicitate Professor Goyal in a befitting manner for his outstanding contributions to the field of Gupta history, epigraphy and culture, which has been his first love for more than a quarter of a century.

In this endeavour all those, who have contributed their papers or have accorded their help in other ways, have earned my gratitude. I also take this opportunity to apologise to all those whom I could not contact or who, due to delay on my part to get in touch with them, could not send their papers or sent them too late to be included in this volume. I hope they will be kind enough to pardon me for the lapse.

It has been indeed a privilege for me to have worked with Professor B.Ch. Chhabra, Dr. P.K. Agrawala and Dr. Ashvini Agrawal, all renowned scholars of Gupta history, epigraphy, culture and art. I am also thankful to all members of the editorial board for having reposed their faith in me. Lastly, I thank Shri Pradeep Goel of M/s Aditya Prakashan, New Delhi, for bringing out this volume so nicely and well in time.

December 12, 1991 Shankar Goyal

प्रशस्तिः

श्रीरामगोयलो विद्वान् भारतेतिहासकोविदः ।

बहूनां ग्रन्थरत्नानां लेखको लोकविश्रुतः ॥ १

गुप्तकालाभिलेखेषु रूचिरस्य विशेषतः ।

तस्मादाश्रित्य तानेव तेन ग्रन्था विनिर्मिताः ॥ २

हिन्दी भाषा प्रचारार्थं सतस्यामलिखद् बहु ।

भूयांसः पाठकास्तेन लभन्ते लाभमद्भुतम् ॥ ३

तस्यैतदुपकारार्थं हिन्दीभाषाप्रशंसकाः ।

व्याहरन्तिप्रमोदेन धन्यवादान् पुनः पुनः ॥ ४

एतैः कतिपयैः शब्दैर्विनीतोऽहं बहादुरः ।

अभिनन्दामि सानन्दं श्रीरामं गोयलं बुधम् ॥ ५

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Part I

S.R. GOYAL AND THE MODERN HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE GUPTA AGE

1

S.R. Goyal's Contribution to Gupta Historiography

Ajay Mitra Shastri

If one were asked to enumerate leading Indian historians alive today, Professor Shri Ram Goyal (SRG) should easily find a place among the more prominent of them. By the sheer volume of his profuse writings and the wide breadth of their coverage, not to speak of their high quality and great originality, he has carved a niche for himself in the field of historical studies. His voluminous works, published or under publication and numbering nearly thirty in English or Hindi, besides about 150 research articles and chapters written for various journals and edited works, cover so very diverse branches as Indian political and religious history, epigraphy, numismatics, biographies, literature and ancient world. For the last nearly three decades he has been working ceaselessly and silently, and the outcome is his voluminous contribution bearing at every inch a stamp of high quality and original thinking. Before he started his historical researches nearly three decades ago, the historical writing in India was, generally speaking, actually in the nature of sheer dynastic accounts highlighting a chronological reconstruction of the course of important events and the achievements of ruling families and individual rulers. Moreover, it was often obsessed with personal prejudices and regional chauvinism resulting in coloured projections with historians writing on a particular dynasty or region generally taking it to be, at least for the time being, su-perior to or more important than other contemporary powers, thereby rendering an objective assessment and scientific reconstruction practically impossible. To add to it, different aspects of history were dealt with in isolation from each other and their interaction was generally ignored. SRG has freed himself from these biases and taken an integrated objective view of history wherein geo-political, socio-economic and religious factors interact with and not unoften determine the course of political events and *vice versa*. He not only studies what happened (*kārya*) but also why it so happened (*kāraṇa*). While recognising the all-important role played by economic factors in shaping the course of history he is happily able to keep himself free from dogmatism characterising the writings of some 'progressive' modern Indian historians. His writings are marked by a freshness of approach and his historical philosophy is singularly refreshing. His works evince 'a significant precision and some sort of definition' and an 'unlaboured style' making the readers 'forget the nerve-racking researches' that underlie them. The beauty of his style lies, *inter alia*, in quoting the original sources and the views of earlier writers on the subject often in a chronological order and analysing them dispassionately before arriving at his own conclusions which are more often than not original and well-based. In this connection it would be of interest to recall the observations of D.R. Bhandarkar in the Preface to the second edition of his classical work on Aśoka in response to the suggestion of some of his scholar friends to convert it into a text-book. He states that he declined to oblige them because accepting their suggestion would have deprived post-graduate students of the opportunity of doing library work involving consultation of standard journals and periodicals.[1] But gone are the days when students used to go through the journals and standard writings; now they and even most of their teachers, generally, depend exclusively on a text-book for a paper or more, not unoften copied from some other works. Under such circumstances the need of the hour is the production of standard books summarising the contents of the original sources and containing a critical appreciation of earlier writings on the subject. This would amount to a great service to the nation and no amount of hard work on the part of conscientious authors would be too great as it would arrest, at least for some time, the steep fall in the academic standards. From this angle SRG's writings, which are at once standard reference works useful for serious researchers as well as post-graduate students and curious readers, set models which deserve emulation by others.

I. HISTORY

With all the excellent work from the prolific pen of SRG, his work on the Imperial Guptas and their contemporaries in North India, with which he launched himself on his research career, still remains his *magnum opus* and by its excellence it surpasses all the works published before it, and the originality of his treatment of such a hackneyed theme as the Gupta history was acknowledged by no less a historian than R.C. Majumdar.[2] We may, therefore, take it up first highlighting only some of the more important contributions made by him and places where it may not be possible for all the readers to agree with his views in spite of all his plausible arguments which, of course, make us athink.

---

[1] *Aśoka*, 3rd edition, Calcutta, 1955, p. xx.

SRG's work on the Imperial Guptas was first published in a book form in English in 1967[3] though some of the important questions were discussed by him in some of his earlier papers.* It has recently been brought out in a revised and updated form in Hindi[4] which may be taken to represent his latest position on the subject, and we shall refer to this work for our present purpose.

The Guptas were generally believed to belong to the third order (Vaiśya) of the Brāhmaṇical society merely on the basis of the *gupta*-ending in their names which is enjoined in the Dharmaśāstra texts for the Vaiśyas ignoring the fact that a number of well-known personages with such names were Brāhmaṇas.[5] SRG was the first to point out that the Guptas were Brāhmaṇas, a conclusion which is backed by numerous considerations and now commonly accepted by historians. Likewise, the analysis of the Chinese and Purāṇic evidences backed by the findspots of early Gupta inscriptions and coin-hoards has righlty led him to the conclusion that eastern Uttar Pradesh with Prāyaga as its centre was the original kingdom of the Guptas.

---

[2] See his Foreword to the *A History of the Imperial Guptas*. In his chapters on the Gupta history in Vol.III, Part I of the *Comprehensive History of India* he cites the views of Professor Goyal, often regarding them as probable.

[3] *A History of the Imperial Guptas*, Allahabad, 1967.

*Before the supplication of his thesis in 1966 and its publication in 1967, more than a dozen research papers of Goyal on Gupta history had been published. They include: 'Were the Imperial Guptas Brāhmaṇas by Caste?' (in Hindi) *Bulletin of the Gorakhpur University*, 1961, pp.5-9; 'Was Magadha the Original Home of the Imperial Guptas?' *PIHC*, 1964 (abstract); 'Was Pāṭaliputra the Capital of the Imperial Guptas?', *PIHC*, 1964 (abstract); 'Samudragupta: the King of the Meharauli Pillar Inscription' (in Hindi), *Nāgarī Prachāriṇī Patrikā*, LXIX, Pt. iii, V.E.2021, pp.261-77; 'Samudragupta and the North-West', *Proceedings of the Oriental Conference*, Gauhati session, 1964, pp.153-68; 'The Problem of Bālādityas in the Gupta Period', *Bhuyan Commemoration Volume*, Gauhati, 1965, pp.100-04; 'Observations on the Śrī Vikrama Coin of Samudragupta', *JNSI*, 1965, XXVII, Pt.ii, pp.142-45; 'The Date of Kālidāsa, An Old Suggestion Modified', *Proceedings of the Oriental Conference*, XXII,i, 1965, p.72 f. (abstract); 'The Date of Vasubandhu and the Identity of His Patron' (in Hindi), *Shri S.N.M. Tripathi Abhinandana Grantha*, Varanasi, 1965, pp.101-07; 'Attribution of Chandragupta-Kumāradevī Coin Type', *Indian Numismatic Chronicle*, IV, Pt.ii, 1965-66, pp.116-26; 'Attribution of the Coins of Prakāśāditya', *JNSI*, 1966, XXVIII, Pt.i, pp.17-20; 'Early Chronology of the Gupta Dynasty', *JBRS*, III, Jan.1966, pp.55-67; 'Gayā and Nālandā Plates of Samudragupta', *JBRS*, III, Jan.1966, pp.68-72.—S.G.

[4] *Gupta Sāmrājya kā Itihāsa*, Meerut, 1987. Ch. I of the English version dealing with the evidence and the author's approach to its interpretation, which is a must, has been dropped in the Hindi work and there are a few other structural changes as well. A few important points have been made in it for the first time.

SRG rightly thinks that the first two Gupta chiefs, Gupta and Ghaṭotkacha, need not necessarily be taken as subordinate to some other superior power on the basis of merely the adoption by them of the comparatively inferior regal title of *mahārāja* as against the superior title of *mahārājādhirāja* used for their successors as the former title or even much simpler title of *rājan* is known to have been used by independent monarchs in the earlier period. He further states that it was Samudragupta who permitted feudal chiefs to assume the title of *mahārāja* when he himself as well as his father Chandragupta employed the title of *mahārājādhirāja*. However, the question is not just confined to this consideration, and we have to take note of the fact that in the same record (Prayāga *praśasti*) Gupta and Ghaṭotkacha are styled *mahārāja* as against Samudragupta himself and his predecessor Chandragupta I who are given the superior title of *mahārājādhirāja* which assumes considerable significance and provides a new perspective on the problem and makes us doubtful on the issue.[6] Ghaṭotkacha is rightly given the credit for the highly eventful matrimonial alliance between the Guptas and the Lichchhavis, which, by uniting Chandragupta I and Kumāradevī into wedlock, resulted into the amalgamation of the twin states forming a mighty united state which could effectively serve as the base for further expansion which encompassed a major portion of the Indian subcontinent.

Chandragupta I probably extended his kingdom westward by adding Sāketa and the description of the Gupta kingdom in the *Vāyu Purāṇa* probably refers to this stage of expanded kingdom. But we are not quite sure if the expression *Māgadhāḥ* in the *Vishṇu Purāṇa* actually refers to the Lichchhavis as suggested by SRG, for there is at the moment no positive evidence to connect the latter with Magadha. Likewise, the question of the determination of the issuer of the Chandragupta-Kumāradevī type coins, which is so very important for the early history of the Guptas, is discussed at great length and SRG generally agrees with the view of J. Allan and V.S. Pathak that they were issued by Samudragupta as commemorative medals with the only difference that he regards them as the earliest issues of Samudragupta. However, the appraisal of all the extant evidence clearly shows that these were actually issued by Chandragupta I himself in commemoration of his momentous marriage with the Lichchhavi princess Kumāradevī, the name of Chandragupta written vertically under the left arm on either side of the standard, which may actually be regarded as the canting badge of the Guptas on such coins, leaving no doubt about the issuer. These coins merely indicate the affectionate regards and the feelings of obligation that Chandragupta I cherished for the Lichchhavis to whom his queen Kumāradevī belonged. The attribution of other types of coins to Chandragupta I by SRG cannot be regarded as certain in the absence of necessary evidence. The suggestion that according to some available data the Gupta era was in existence even in the early fourth century A.D. clearly indicates that it dates from pre-Chandragupta II period as against the view of Sudhakara Chattopadhyaya and P.L. Gupta that it was actually initiated by Chandragupta II himself who, however, counted it not from his accession or any other event in his life but from Chandragupta I's accession or his assumption of the title *mahārājādhirāja* is well-taken; but unfortunately we have at the moment no definite evidence to prove that the era was actually initiated by Chandragupta I or Samudragupta. We find it difficult to accept the long reign of nearly thirty years allotted to Chandragupta I and a short reign of just about twenty-five years to his son Samudragupta which is against all circumstantial evidence.

---

[5] The name of Dāmodaragupta, the celebrated author of the *Kuṭṭanī-mata*, could have been added to the instances quoted by SRG. See Shastri, Ajay Mitra , *India as Seen in the Kuṭṭanī-mata of Dāmodaragupta*, Delhi, 1975, p.18.

[6] The same, I think, is true of the Vākāṭaka inscriptions where the Vākāṭaka kings are given the simpler title of *mahārāja* as against Chandragupta II (often called Devagupta) who is invariably styled *mahārājādhirāja*.

We do not know how far it is correct to regard Bhasma mentioned in the late Buddhist text *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* as identical with the king Kācha known from coins though SRG thinks so.

The treatment of Samudragupta is simply refreshing and helps give a clearer light on some of the baffling problems concerning his times. The great historical value of his Allahabad *praśasti* is adequately brought out, and doubts about it voiced by some historians including R.C. Majumdar are dispelled. The conclusion that the description of Samudragupta's conquests is neither chronological nor geographical but a consolidated or edited account based on different kinds of policy adopted towards the defeated powers is of great historical significance. For, it would no longer be necessary for the historians to trace the routes of invasion followed by Samudragupta for various expeditions which were actually taken up at different times and not in one stretch as generally believed hitherto. Moreover, not all the different modes of policy listed in connection with the kings of Dakshiṇāpatha, bordering (*pratyanta*) powers and foreign rulers should be expected to be applicable to all the rulers of a group and it is quite likely that one or other of them may have been adopted towards them. The emergence of the Gaṅgā basin as the epicentre of imperial power has been shown to have resulted as much from its peculiar geo-political, socio-religious and economic situation as from the expansionist ambitions of the ruling chiefs. The conquest of Bengal is rightly regarded as at least partially motivated by economic factors, while the southern expedition also may have been caused by his lure for prosperity due to rich commercial crops and minerals as well as sea-borne trade. While it is extremely difficult, nay impossible, to determine the chronology of these expeditions, SRG has been able to establish 359-60 A.D. as the date of one of the Kaliṅga campaigns on the basis of the Ceylonese chronicles. While the analysis of Samudragupta's extirpation of the Nāgas, which was really a great achievement, is convincing, one cannot be quite sure if sectarian considerations (Vaishṇava-Śaiva) played an important role as suggested by SRG. It is also not quite certain if Samudragupta was really under the influence of Buddhism which is supposed, without any supporting evidence, to have continued to be the religion of his maternal relations, the Lichchhavis, down to the fourth century A.D. For, if one were to concede it, it would really be difficult to believe that he was so very inimical to the Nāgas because, *inter alia*, they happened to be Śaivas while he himself was a staunch Vaishṇava. The same is true regarding the suggestion that the choice by Samudragupta of Garuḍa for his and the family's royal emblem was dictated by his hostility towards the Nāgas, for we are not quite sure if it was chosen by Samudragupta himself and did not already occupy this position before him. Actually Garuḍa is present on the coins of Kācha who, according to SRG, ruled before Samudra. Likewise, if the religious considerations were so very pronounced, it would be extremely difficult to explain the deliberate matrimonial alliance with the Śaiva Vākāṭakas which must have obviously been arranged during the closing years of Samudragupta's reign. One cannot also be sure that the city 'Pushpa' where Samudragupta is said to have been 'playing' while his armies captured the Kota-kula chief is actually identical with Kannauj and not with Pāṭaliputra which was also known by this name and which, according to SRG himself, had already become a part of Samudragupta's empire due to the amalgamation of the Lichchhavi kingdom. We strongly feel that as the capital of the Lichchhavis, according to SRG, it must have continued to be an important political centre and it is not impossible if Samudragupta was actually resting at that place. It is quite likely that Samudragupta established some ruling families in the conquered territories, but it is impossible to believe that the Pāṇḍavas of Mekalā were one of them, for, as we have shown elsewhere, the family's political career really began in about 500 A.D.[7] SRG has made out a plausible, though not quite certain, case for the identification of Rudradeva of the Prayāga *praśasti* with Vākāṭaka Rudrasena I and he may be right in connecting his expedition against him with his expedition against the Nāgas and taking it as an aftermath of his successful war (wars) against them though the prevailing belief that the non-mention of the territories along with the names of the rulers of Āryāvarta defeated by Samudragupta indicates that they were completely annihilated casts some doubt against this suggestion. His reconstruction of the events connected with Samudragupta's expeditions in the north-west is especially interesting as is his identification of the ruling powers of this region. The identification of the Purāṇic king Pramati with Samudragupta, which was proposed by us nearly two and half decades back,[8] has been rightly supported by SRG independently. The view that Kālidāsa had in his mind the conquests of Samudragupta while describing the *digvijaya* of the mythical king Raghu is also quite plausible, one of the stanzas (*Raghuvaṁśa*, IV.43) using almost identical expression (*gṛhīta-pratimukta*) in connection with a Dakshiṇāpatha king as used by Harisheṇa with reference to Samudragupta's southern conquests (*grahaṇa-moksha*). But the same cannot be said regarding SRG's now well-known identification of king Chandra whose achievements are summarily described in the posthumous Meharauli iron pillar inscription with Samudragupta which is, according to us,[9] not so well-based, though, it cannot be gainsaid that it deserves serious consideration in any discussion of the problem.[10] There is absolutely no doubt that, as strongly advocated by SRG, Samudragupta was the greatest king of the Gupta dynasty. That he performed at least two Aśvamedha sacrifices is strongly supported not only by two types of legends on his gold coins issued in commemoration or on the occasions of these sacrifices but also by the expression *anek-āśvamedha-yājin* used with reference to Samudragupta in the records of his grand-daughter Prabhāvatīguptā, as *aneka* may be taken in the sense of more than one as we have been stating in our classroom for nearly last three decades but which SRG has put in writing. These horse sacrifices were distinct from similar sacrifices performed by some other ruling powers as the former were observed with full complements which earned for Samudragupta the *viruda chir-otsann-āśvamedh-āhartṛ* met with in the records of his descendants. However, the possibility of his *digvijaya* being a part of the Aśvamedha sacrifices deserves a close examination though, it must be admitted, we have no dependable evidence on this point. However, the allotment of just about twenty-five years, if not less, to such an eventful reign looks rather inadequate, especially when compared with the rather uneventful reign of his father Chandragupta I who is granted about three decades. While there can be absolutely no doubt regarding the greatness of the exploits and rich contributions of Samudragupta to the growth of the Gutpa empire, SRG appears to have unnecessarily robbed his son Chandragupta II Vikramāditya of at least a part of his greatness and attributed it to Samudragupta to whom he appears to be too partial. His attempt to trace the origin of the Vikramāditya tradition to Samudragupta instead of to Chandragupta II as commonly believed is probably due to this partiality.[11]

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[7] *Early History of the Deccan: Problems and Perspectives*, Delhi, 1987, pp. 192 ff.

[8] See our paper 'The Purāṇic King Pramati: Some Reflections', *infra*, pp.95-122.

[9] For a detailed exposition of SRG's theory and comments including ours, see Joshi, M.C. and Gupta, S.K. (eds.), *King Chandra and the Meharauli Pillar*, Meerut, 1989.

Samudragupta was succeeded by his son, apparently elder, Rāmagupta whose historicity is discussed successfully at great length. But it is difficult to believe merely because his coins and inscriptions have been reported from eastern Malwa that his rule was confined to this region where he had raised the standard of revolt. It is also uncertain if the tradition of distorting historical facts beyond proportion with the object of tarnishing a rival chief's image in order to justify the patron's act of usurpation of the royal throne as seen in Bilhaṇa's *Vikramāṅkadevacharita*, which is a text of the medieval age, had already come into existence in the same developed stage about eight centuries before in the Gupta age and is supposed to have been at the root of Viśākhadatta's *Devīchandragupta* which was composed, according to SRG, with a view to justifying Chandragupta II's usurpation of the regal power from Rāmagupta who may actually have not been so very weak and docile. This view seems to be negated by the allusion to Chandragupta's act of killing the Śaka king in the guise of a woman in the *Harshacharita*[12] of Bāṇa, who is known for his keen historical sense, only about two centuries after the rule of Chandragupta II. Moreover, it is not certain if Viśākhadatta was actually a contemporary of Chandragupta II to have been influenced by him. As stated above, SRG has tried to underplay Chandragupta II's career. But it has been successfully demonstrated by him that the popular view that the marriage of his daughter Prabhāvatīguptā with the Vākāṭaka king Rudrasena II was deliberately arranged with the object of securing the help of the Vākāṭakas in his expeditions against the Śaka Kshatrapas of Western India which were to take place nearly two decades later is incorrect. All the same his victory over the Śakas was of great importance politically and economically as it completed Samudragupta's *digvijaya* by extending the empire from the eastern to the western sea. However, the annihilation of the Śaka Kshatrapas was not completed during his reign as we find dates on their silver issues well within the reign of Kumāragupta I[13] who appears to have dealt a final blow to them. SRG has dated this event towards the end of his reign, but the numismatic evidence makes it uncertain,[14] and the fact that even after him the Śakas continued to rule for some time should suffice to prove that it was actually a forbidding task involving a long series of military engagements and gradual annexation of the Kshatrapa territories. Owing to the short weak rule of his elder brother Rāmagupta which ended ignominously, the very foundations of the Gupta empire were shaken with a number of feudatories rising in rebellion, and Chandragupta II had to reconquer territories in all the directions which is described summarily though beautifully in his Meharauli iron pillar inscription according to us.[15] The very fact that he was able to re-establish his authority in all these regions and achieve fresh successes against the Śaka Kshatrapas of Gujarat and Kathiawar and extended the empire farther in the Balkh region redounds to his credit, and his comparison with the Mughal emperor Jehāngīr who squandered away the glory of the empire over wine and women is apparently quite inept. However, SRG appears to be right in thinking that the extant evidence does not warrant the view that Govindagupta became emperor, and Chandragupta II was actually succeeded by Kumāragupta I.

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[10] Some scholars have already regarded this view as quite probable. See *ibid.*

[11] We, however, believe that there must have been a chief called Vikrama in the first century B.C. and it was evidently in emulation of his deeds that at least some of the Gupta emperors assumed this *viruda*.

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[12] According to SRG, it was composed *circa* 620 A.D.

[13] This evidence is still unpublished.

[14] The unit figures of the date of the last known Kshatrapa coins and the silver coins of Chandragupta II issued in imitation of the coins of their conquered adversaries, which alone form the basis of this information, are not legible. The presence of the inscriptions of his reign in eastern Malwa and the description of Chandragupta II as having gone to Udayagiri (Vidiśā district, Madhya Pradesh) with the object of the conquest of the whole earth are not so very relevant in this context and so is the rarity of his silver issues.

Kumāragupta I is known for his profuse monetary issues in gold, silver, copper, which are widely known, and the not-so-very-common lead. As against Chandragupta II's coins, which are very briefly noticed in just one short paragraph, coins of Kumāragupta I are described fairly adequately in about three pages. The suggestion that Kumāragupta's relations with the Vākāṭakas were not so very friendly and that the involvement of the Nalas in the conflict against the Vākāṭakas was on behalf of the Guptas deserves serious consideration, though the manner of reference to the marriage of Prabhāvatīguptā with Rudrasena II as continued in the records of Narendrasena's son Pṛthivīsheṇa II seems to point to the continuation of friendly relations between the Guptas and the Vākāṭakas. On the basis of the finds of Kumāragupta's coins in the Deccan, it has been suggested that Kumāragupta probably had some southern conquests to his credit, though we have to be extremely cautious while drawing such conclusions from coin-finds.[16] We are extremely doubtful if such a vital conclusion as Kumāragupta left his body at his own will can be drawn from the verse-quarter *pitari sura-sakhitvaṁ prāptavaty-ātmaśaktyā* in the Junagadh inscription of his son Skandagupta as the expression *ātma-śaktyā* can as well be construed with *avanat-āriḥ* in the previous quarter.[17]

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[15] For our view on this question, see Joshi, M.C. and Gupta, S.K. (editors), *op.cit.*, pp.85-91.

[16] Moreover, as pointed out by P.L. Gupta (*Gupta Sāmrājya*, Varanasi, 1970, p.92), the hoard of 1395 silver coins of Kumāragupta was actually made at Sanaud in the Ahmedabad District of Gujarat. But V.A. Smith, by oversight, referred to it as hailing from the Satara District of Maharashtra and this mistake has been repeated by John Allan and A.S. Altekar from whom SRG has derived his information.

[17] The second half of the stanza (3) runs as follows:

Avanim=avanat-ārir=yaś=chakār-ātma-saṁsthāṁ
Pitari sura-sakhitvaṁ prāpavaty-ātma-śaktyā //
—Goyal, S.R., *Guptakālīna Abhilekha*, Meerut, 1984, p.225.

The conclusion that Kumāragupta I passed away sometime in 454 A.D. and was succeeded by his son Skandagupta in the same year looks plausible, but the same cannot be said regarding the reconstruction of the course of events of the supposed civil war for succession and the identification of the Pushyamitras mentioned in the Bhitari pillar inscription of Skandagupta as vanquished by him with the Mekalā Pāṇḍava king Bharatabala *alias* Indra who actually appears to have flourished over a century after the Gupta emperor.[18] Actually the reference may be to the predecessors of the Pāṇḍavas. As we have pointed out elsewhere,[19] the statement in some of the records of the Vākāṭaka king Pṛthivīsheṇa II that the commands of his father Narendrasena were respected by the ruling powers of Kosalā, Mekalā and Mālava need not be regarded as of any great historical consequence and may probably actually allude to the help that he might have rendered to his Imperial Gupta cousin in maintaining his hold over these regions or to merely hurried raids without any lasting outcome that he might have undertaken at the cost of the Guptas.

The reconstruction of the post-Skandagupta order of succession among the Imperial Guptas is beset with enormous problems and SRG's solution can be easily regarded as the best possible under the circumstances.

There are two brief but excellent chapters at the end throwing welcome systematic light on the administrative organisation of the Imperial Guptas and economic life during the Gupta age as well as the Classical culture of the Gupta age. In recent years some so-called progressive historians have tried to express doubts about the correctness of the popular notion of earlier historians that the Gupta period was the golden or Classical age of ancient Indian history, and this criticism has reached its climax in some of the highly baseless observations of certain self-styled historians which may be called 'wild', to use the mildest term. SRG has aptly tried to refute these observations. If a period marked by the issue of a large volume of gold coins and linguistic, literary and artistic efflorescence cannot be called golden age, which other period will be entitled to be styled so?

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[18] Shastri, Ajay Mitra, 'The Pāṇḍavas of Mekalā', Bhagwant Sahai (ed.), *History and Culture* (B.P. Sinha Felicitation Volume), Delhi 1987, pp.472-91; *Inscriptions of the Śarabhapurīyas, Pāṇḍuvaṁśins and Somavaṁśins,* Part I, Delhi, 1991, pp. 117-32.

[19] *Early History of the Deccan: Problems and Perspectives,* p.61.

The above is just a hurried survey of the rich contribution of SRG to the reconstruction and understanding of the political and cultural history of the Gupta age which can be described as simply monumental. In his works for the first time all the original sources have been given their full due with the result that his conclusions are generally well-based, though the very nature of the available evidence leaves much room for difference of opinion.

SRG has also produced subsequently, voluminously, and with great precision and judicious integrated approach, works on the preceding and succeeding periods of Indian history. The whole series consists of three volumes of over two thousand pages in Hindi. The second volume in the series is entitled *Gupta aura Vākāṭaka Sāmrājyoṅ ka yugā,*[20] which forms a revised and updated version of his earlier work *Gupta aura Samakālina Rājavaṁśa,*[21] and deals exhaustively with the Gupta-Vākāṭaka age, as indicated by its title. The treatment of the history of the Imperial Guptas is in substance the same as in the *A History of the Imperial Guptas* and the *Gupta Sāmrājya kā Itihāsa* delineated earlier. The remainder of the book provides a critical perspective on the Vākāṭakas and their contemporaries in the Deccan and South India. The Vākāṭakas have been rightly shown to have commenced their political career in the North and migrated to the Deccan shortly afterwards.[22] Some other points connected with the relations of the Vākāṭakas with the Imperial Guptas have been highlighted in connections with SRG's views on the history of the Imperial Guptas. We have to add that Rudrasena II had three, not two, sons by Prabhāvatīguptā: Divākarasena, Dāmodarasena and Pravarasena II as shown by the recently discovered Miregaon plates of Prabhāvatīguptā[23] and that recently evidence of the expansion of the authority of the Vākāṭakas in Andhra Pradesh and northern Karnataka has come to light.[24] It must be admitted that on many a point it is simply not possible not to agree with SRG.

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[20] Meerut, 1988.

[21] Allahabad, 1969.

[22] Generally speaking, we hold an identical view. See 'Original Home of the Vākāṭakas', *Bhāratī* (New Series). No.2, Vārāṇasī, 1984, pp.97-105.

[23] See our *Early History of the Deccan: Problems and Perspectives*. pp.51-52; 'The Vākāṭaka Kings Dāmodarasena and Pravarasena II'.

[24] Vide our *Early History of the Deccan: Problems and Perspectives*, pp.71-74; P.V. Parabrahma Sastry, 'Hyderabad Plates of Vākāṭaka Devasena, Year 5', *JESI*, XIII, 71-75.

Biographies of great historical personages are a recognised branch of historical literature, and we have historical biographies of Chandragupta Maurya, Aśoka, Samudragupta, Chandragupta II Vikramāditya and Harshavardhana by eminent Indian and European historians. SRG has enriched this genre as well by his well thought out and planned volumes on the first three and fifth of them in Hindi.[25] These substantially enrich our historical knowledge and outshine earlier works of this genre by their fresh integral approach, precision of details, exhaustiveness and absorbing style. Samudragupta has received an independent work on him for the first time which he deserves most in view of his greatness both in political and cultural spheres. We would like to suggest English versions of these and other works of this type in the interest of wider readership.

II. EPIGRAPHY

Among the sources of Indian history, both political and cultural, epigraphy ranks supreme. SRG has projected himself as a master of this branch as well and produced three monumental works on early Indian inscriptions. The second volume in the series called *Guptakālīna Abhilekha* brings together all the worth-while inscriptions of the Gupta age. The treatment of each inscription falls in three parts: (1)discussion about its provenance and earlier publications and discussions of its contents, (2)text of the inscription and (3)a readable but usually accurate literal Hindi translation and comments on historically important difficult expressions. The epigraphs are arranged under suitable heads, and connected problems relating to the origin of scripts and reckonings employed in various records are discussed at length and original suggestions worth serious consideration have been made. The volume includes not only the *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings*[26] but the re- cords of their contemporaries as well, including all the inscriptions discovered up to 1984, the year of publication of the work, and thereby excels J.F. Fleet's *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings and their Successors* published in 1888 and its revised version edited by D.R. Bhandarkar, B.Ch. Chhabra and G.S. Gai published in 1981.

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[25] (1) *Chandragupta Maurya*, Meerut,1987; (2) *Priyadarśī Aśoka*, Meerut,1988; *Samudragupta Parākramāṅka*, Meerut,1987; (4) *Harsha Śīlāditya*, Meerut, 1986.

[26] This is the title of the revised edition of Fleet's *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings and their Successors* prepared by D.R. Bhandarkar and revised by B.Ch. Chhabra and G.S. Gai, published by the Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi, in 1981.

To sum up, SRG's contribution to the political and cultural history and epigraphy of the Gupta age is by any yardstick simply immense and monumental. We wish him a long fruitful life enabling him to go on advancing the bounds of our historical knowledge.

2

S.R. Goyal and Modern Historiography of the Gupta Age

Priti Kumar Mitra

I

The age of the imperial Guptas which covers the fourth and fifth centuries of the Christian era and the first half of the sixth has been one of the most favourite areas of exploration by modern historians of ancient India. Since the history of the Gupta dynasty started being reconstructed in late nineteenth century, historians of different ideological persuations have tried to interpret the period in their own terms and have developed warring schools of historiography. The imperialist historians' concept of "oriental despotism," a common key to their interpretation of ancient and medieval South Asian political history, was applied by Vincent A. Smith in his *The Early History of India* (rev. 4th ed. 1924) to describe the reigns of Samudragupta and Chandragupta II.[1] Imperialist historiography of pre-modern India was challenged by the nationalist historians whose origins may be traced to the neo-Hindu intellectualism of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The idea of oriental despotism was confronted with the "golden age" or "classical age" model by such nationalist historians as A.S. Altekar and R.C. Majumdar in their *Vākāṭaka-Gupta Age* (1946).[2] The climax of this nationalist interpretation of the Gupta empire was reached in 1962 with the publication of *The Classical Age*, the third volume of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan's multi-volume *History and Culture of the Indian People* under the general editorship of R.C. Majumdar. The tradition has since been followed by others. Meanwhile Marxist historians appeared on the scene seeking to explode the "golden age" utopia on the ground of the presence of cruel and exploitative inequalities in Gupta society. D.D.

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[1] Smith, *The Early History of India*, 2nd ed., rev. and enl., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), pp.267, 278.

[2] Particularly see Altekar's verdict on the Gupta period in the Introduction. Majumdar, R.C., and Altekar, A.S., (eds.), *The Vākāṭaka-Gupta Age* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1960), pp.11-12.

Kosambi's *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History* (1956), and Romila Thapar's *A History of India*, Vol.1 (1966), introduced this new dimension in modern historiography of the Gupta empire. At this juncture we find Professor S.R. Goyal entering the scene with an entirely new approach to the subject and startling results of a fresh and thorough investigation in the area. His doctoral dissertation was published in 1976 as *A History of the Imperial Guptas* and immediately got him a place among chief interpreters of the Gupta age. In the following pages we are going to describe some of the salient features of Professor Goyal's contribution to Gupta history and their impact on subsequent writers on the subject. But before that we would like to clarify his ideological position among historians of the period.

II

In *A History of the Imperial Guptas*, which is primarily a political history, Goyal does not refer to the "golden age" thesis at all. Meanwhile the Marxist protest began to cast its impact on other historians too. S.K. Maity, writing in 1975, accepted Romila Thapar's modification saying that the "golden age" prosperity was true "only for a limited section of the community."[3] Then came the arch-Marxist D.N. Jha whose highly polemical *Ancient India: An Introductory Outline* (1977) put the "golden age" model upside down and fixed its possibility up in a distant (Marxist?) future.[4] Thereafter we find Professor Goyal defending the nationalist model in his *Gupta Sāmrājya kā Itihāsa* [History of the Gupta Empire] (1987) by pointing out the weaknesses and contradictions in Thapar's and Jha's arguments.[5] In *A History of the Imperial Guptas* Goyal is clearly enamoured with the Gupta empire and seems to be quite emotionally concerned with its growth, integrity and security.[6] He notices emphatic nationalist orientation of the Gupta culture itself, particularly of the Brāhmaṇic revival that coincided with the Gupta empire. In support of this thesis Goyal has frequently quoted from such nationalist historians as R.C. Majumdar and A.S. Altekar.[7] Emperor Samudragupta has been depicted as a national hero of Napoleonic stature. Not only that, Samudragupta compares far favourably with Aśoka Maurya whose policy had made the country "lost to nationalism and political greatness."[8]

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[3] Maity, Sachindra K., *The Imperial Guptas and their Times* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1975), p.1.

[4] Jha, *Ancient India: An Introductory Outline* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1977), pp.96-116.

[5] Goyal, *Gupta Sāmrājya kā Itihāsa* [History of the Gupta Empire] (Meerut: Kusumanjali Prakashan, 1987), pp.424-26.

[6] Note the emotion-packed language with which Goyal condemns the military negligence of Chandragupta II that, according to Goyal, prevented the Empire's expansion and its logical fulfilment of greatness. *A History of the Imperial Guptas* (Allahabad: Central Book Depot, 1967), p.250.

Professor David N. Lorenzen of El Cologio De Mexico has described Goyal as "the best of a new group of conservative historians who have reformulated nationalist historiography" to suit post-Chinese-invasion (1962) realities in the subcontinent. He then goes on to argue that Goyal has been writing "quite direct commentaries on contemporary India through implicit comparison between it and the conditions in the Gupta age" and "drawing an implicit moral lesson for contemporary India."[9] Lorenzen feels that two great political controversies, namely, that over the question of the appropriate level of India's military preparedness against threats from China and Pakistan and that over the question of the extent of federalism in India, have cast their impact on Goyal's treatment of Buddhism and the feudal-federal structure of the Gupta empire respectively as the two chief causes of the empire's decline and fall.[10] However, it is not at all clear why a researcher working on the Gupta empire should regard that empire as an "unstable aberration" and the small and warring regional states as the more stable order of things in ancient India.[11] Despite such neo-imperialist bias of Lorenzen, his identification of S.R. Goyal as a neo-nationalist historian may be accepted with the modification that Goyal is scientific in approach and nationalist in spirit. Indeed Goyal feels that the distinction between the nationalist and scientific historians is more or less artificial and some sort of nationalist bias is found among historians of all countries when they write about the past of their own people. In support of this statement Goyal quotes R.C. Majumdar who declared (*Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, p.417) that the nationalist bias "is not necessarily in conflict with a scientific and critical study, and a nationalist historian is not...necessarily a propagandist or a charlatan."[12]

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[7] *Ibid.*, pp.63-65.

[8] *Ibid.*, p.189.

[9] Lorenzen, David M., 'Professor Goyal's Suggestion on Political Hisotry Writing in the Light of Historians and Political History of the Gupta Empuire', in Pande, G.C., Gupta, S.K., and Goyal,Shankar (eds.), *Political History in a Changing World* (Jodhpur: Kusumanjali Publishing House, 1991), pp.53-54.

[10] *Ibid.*, pp.54-55.

[11] Lorezen, 'Professor Goyal's Suggestion on Political History Writing', p.55.

III

Despite such significant affinities with nationalist historians Goyal has also fundamental differences with the more credulous of them. He criticises the arch-nationalist K.P. Jayaswal for his bias and ambivalence. On the other hand, he finds the "dry facts" seeking Rankean scientism of R.G. Bhandarkar barren and inadequate and puts aside A.L. Basham's advice to only look for "what happened" in ancient India as not applicable to the Gupta period. He then proposes a new "why did it happen?" approach aiming at the dry facts' "interpretations in the light of a particular ideology." We do not know whether this "particular ideology" is nationalism or not. But to achieve the goal of interpretational fulfilment one has to follow a method that takes into account the "situational contexts" of historical events such as components of political power having "social, economic and religious bases." Goyal's new approach also enjoins that "the different aspects of history cannot be studied in isolation" from one another but "only as facets of an integrated reality." Then he asserts that ample material on the Gupta period is available now and quite a good number of aspectual studies have been completed by competent scholars to warrant an integrated study of political history in its contextual relatedness.[13]

Thus Goyal's historiography involves three elements: (1) contextualism, (2) integrated study of aspectual topics, and (3) interpretation with an ideological bias. So far as our knowledge goes, this urge for a new history of the Gupta period has not been challenged by any subsequent researcher, nor does it seem to have been accepted or followed by any of them.

IV

For his own, Goyal has opened his *History of the Imperial Guptas* with a critical exposure of his sources and a clear statement of his method and approach along with a historiographic review of historical writings on the Guptas. Then he gives an analysis of the geographical, social, cultural and economic factors leading to the rise of the Central Gaṅgā Valley. Compared to this, S.K. Maity writing in 1975 has given little contextual explanation of the rise of the Guptas.[14] Ashvini Agrawal (1989) has a chapter on the sources, describes at length the political condition of India before the Guptas appear on the scene, and gives some information about the predecessors of the Imperial Guptas in Magadha.[15] But we do not find in his narrative any of the multidimensional developments that, as Goyal has endeavoured to show, made the rise of the Guptas historically possible. In consonance with his geopolitical analysis Goyal identified eastern U.P. as the original home of the Guptas in contrast to the traditional theory of their Magadhan origin and D.C. Ganguly's contention of early Gupta association with Bengal. Goyal's dissenting opinion is firmly based on archaeological arguments which appear "weighty" to Maity who, however, in deference to the other theories, concludes that Śrīgupta ruled a petty kingdom somewhere in North and West Bengal.[16] Indeed, none of the archaeological evidences on which Goyal bases his arguments belongs prior to the reign of Samudragupta. Agrawal agrees with Goyal in identifying eastern U.P. as the original home and nucleus of the Gupta empire.[17] He, however, does not make any reference to Goyal's conclusion published twenty-two years earlier. The identification of Gupta original home also leads Goyal to conclude that "at least in the early part of their history, the Guptas had their capital at Prayāga" [Allahabad] which according to the *Purāṇas* was "the nucleus of the original Gupta home."[18] Maity remains indifferent about Prayāga and seems to prefer the traditional opinion that Pāṭaliputra was the imperial capital of the Guptas. Agrawal does not take up the capital question at all and does not, on archaeological grounds, find it likely that the Guptas initially possessed Prayāga.[19] Goyal also determines that the imperial Guptas were Brāhmaṇas by caste,[20] which is a new suggestion. Maity avoids such specification and remains satisfied with the general statement that the Gupta emperors were "Brāhmaṇical Hindus."[21] Agrawal on the other hand affirms the Brāhmaṇa status of the Guptas,[22] but without any reference to S.R. Goyal's earlier conclusion.

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[12] Goyal, *Imperial Guptas*, pp.33-34.

[13] *Ibid.*, pp.34-40.

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[14] Maity, *Imperial Guptas*, pp.15-20.

[15] Agrawal, Ashvini, *Rise and Fall of the Imperial Guptas* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1989), pp.1-78.

[16] Maity, *Imperial Guptas*, p.19.

[17] Agrawal, *Rise and Fall*, pp.79-82.

[18] Goyal, *Imperial Guptas*, p.211.

[19] Agrawal, *Rise and Fall*, p.82.

[20] Goyal, *Imperial Guptas*, pp.78-81.

[21] Maity, *Imperial Guptas*, p.12.

[22] Agrawal, *Rise and Fall*, pp.82-84.

The central chapter (Chapter 3) of *A History of the Imperial Guptas* is devoted to emperor Samudragupta who is the supreme hero of Gupta history as reconstructed by Goyal. This chapter is largely based on the Allahabad Pillar Inscription which has been subjected to the most exhaustive analysis ever done by any scholar. The Meharauli Iron Pillar Inscription is also ingeniously interpreted in favour of Samudragupta, thus rendering Chandragupta II devoid of most of the heroic glories he has been traditionally credited with on the authority of that document. Samudragupta is given the entire credit of empire-building through military prowess, judicious diplomacy, efficient administration, liberal religious policy, and lofty cultural ideal. Samudragupta is made into a superhero greater than Aśoka Maurya and more successful than Napoleon.[23] In the next chapter the two personalities, Samudragupta and Chandragupta II, have been juxtaposed together to highlight their difference. Chandragupta II is debunked with allegations of military negligence, indifference to the empire's potentials for expansion and greatness, and an ease-loving life of culture and enjoyment. He is likened with such mediocre rulers as Govinda IV Rāshṭrakūṭa, his own son and successor Kumāragupta I, and the Mughal emperor Jahāngīr.[24] This lionization of Samudragupta at the expense of Chandragupta II has not received much approval from scholars. Maity has partly accepted it, but R.C. Majumdar and Ashvini Agrawal have remained faithful to the traditional balance between the achievements of the two emperors. We shall have more of this theme later in this paper in connection with our discussion of Goyal's treatment of the Meharauli Pillar Inscription's king "Chandra" issue.[25]

Goyal's preference of Samudragupta over Chandragupta II has a broader connotation. It is the preference of military quality over cultural achievement. In Goyal's evaluation Samudragupta emerges as the worthiest emperor followed by Skandagupta while Chandragupta II and Kumāragupta I are bracketed together as "transformed" emperors of ease and peace. By developing the "transformation" theory which means weakening of the Gupta military potentials due to the fine arts and enjoyment of culture as well as an amour for the Buddhist ideology, Goyal tends to downgrade the cultural and intellectual achievements of the empire as a negative element against the positive role of the military and diplomatic capabilities of Samudragupta. Goyal's reconstruction of Samudragupta's North-Western policy in the light of the Allahabad and Meharauli Pillar Inscriptions is a brilliant piece of scholarship which involves new interpretation of parts of the inscriptions leading to non-conventional conclusions. Thus he explains the defeat in 367-68 A.D. of Shāhānshāh Shāpur II of Iran at the hands of the petty Kushāṇa ruler, Kidāra, of the Kabul valley in terms of the latter's alliance with and assistance from Samudragupta. In this connection Goyal's equation of the term "Shāhānushāhi" occurring in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription with the Persian "Shāhānshāh" is most plausible and crucial. Maity has ignored this interpretation. Agrawal also does not subscribe to this equation, but generally agrees with Goyal about Samudragupta's involvement in the North-West, although he does not refer to Goyal[26] in particular. Goyal's findings on the role of religion in Gupta polity is a major breakthrough. Brāhmaṇic revivalism, tussle between the conservative and liberal forms of revived Brāhmaṇism, Vaishṇava political ideology and Śaiva-Vaishṇava rivalry in the political field, and the decaying influence of Buddhism in the twilight of the empire—these dimensions of religion's role give new meaning to Gupta political history. In fact, Goyal tends to see the historical relation between the Maurya and the Gupta empires in terms of the Brāhmaṇa-Buddhist dialectic in ancient India. "Actually," he observes, "to a modern student of ancient India [n history] Samudragupta appears as the best answer which the Hindu society gave to the Buddhist ideal and example set by Aśoka."[27] Goyal's redefinition of the diverse role of religion in the rise, fulfilment and demise of the Gupta empire is most penetrating and deserves recognition by the scholarly world. Indeed, his findings and insights should provoke an independent research on the religious factor alone in Gupta history. Subsequent writers have not generally opposed this part of Goyal's thesis except the relation between Buddhism and decline which we are going to examine later in this paper.

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[23] Goyal, *Imperial Guptas*, pp.184-90.

[24] *Ibid.*, pp.248-53, 255.

[25] *Infra*, pp.23-28.

Goyal also presents an impressive reconstruction of the Gupta diplomatic history. The ups and downs of the Gupta-Vākāṭaka relations have been successfully delineated with necessary explanations. Such ententes as those between the Guptas and the Lichchhavis, between the

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[26] Agrawal, *Rise and Fall*, p.122.

[27] Goyal, *Imperial Guptas*, p.188.

Vākāṭakas and the Bhāraśivas, between the Guptas and the Kushāṇas, between the Guptas and the Nalas, between the Vākāṭakas and the Kadambas, and between the Vākāṭakas and the Pushyamitras have been keenly examined to illustrate the history of Gupta diplomacy. Goyal has reconstructed the Gupta chronology anew through a number of appendices.[28] This, however, has not been accepted yet by scholars.

V

Professor Goyal has duly addressed all the outstanding problems of Gupta history and made scholarly efforts to solve them. He has also done a lot of fact-finding work and given the result in revealing appendices. Some of his solutions have proved acceptable to many scholars and other have provoked further enquiry and rethinking. In the following pages we are going to examine some of these issues as treated by Professor Goyal and responses that treatment has provoked from scholars writing since the publication of Goyal's *History of the Imperial Guptas*.

A. CHANDRAGUPTA-KUMĀRADEVĪ TYPE OF GOLD COINS

With reinforced arguments Goyal upholds J. Allan's view that the Chadragupta-Kumāradevī type of gold coins was issued not by Chandragupta I but by Samudragupta. Refuting Altekar's and others' objections to Allan's theory Goyal also determines, modifying Allan's view significantly, that the type was the earliest in the Gupta gold coin series and was issued by Samudragupta in the initial years of his reign in order to show that as a *dvyāmushyāyaṇa* heir to his maternal grandfather, the erstwhile ruler of the Lichchhavis, he had a better claim to the imperial throne than his rival brothers with whom he had fought a succession war.[29] This conclusion of Goyal has not been acceptable to S.K. Maity who sticks to the conventional theory that the coins in question were struck by Chandragupta I to commemorate his marriage with Kumāradevī, the Lichchhavi princess.[30] But it has found full support of V.C. Pandey and Goyal himself made a restatement of it with more logic in 1987.[31] Then in 1989 Ashvini Agrawal sided with Altekar and concluded that "the Chandragupta-Kumāradevī type of gold coins were struck by Chandragupta I himself to fulfil the terms of [his] agreement with the Lichchhavis whose princess was the heiress to her parent's dominion." He also thinks with Altekar that the royal couple were ruling the Gupta-Lichchhavi dominions jointly like William III and Mary II of Britain during 1688-1694.[32]

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[28] *Ibid.*, Appendices i of Chapter II, ii and vi of Chap. III, ii of Chap. V, and the one attached to Chap.VI.

[29] *Ibid.*, pp.115-21.

[30] Maity, *Imperial Guptas*, pp.21, 24-25.

[31] Goyal, S.R., *Gupta āura Vākāṭaka Sāmrājyoṅ kā Yuga* [Age of the Gupta and Vākāṭaka Empires] (Meerut: Kusumanjali Prakashan, 1988), pp.46-57.

B. THE RIDDLE OF KĀCHA

The idea of a succession war fought by Samudragupta takes us to another knotty problem of Gupta history, viz., the question of place and status of Kācha whose gold coins bear close resemblance to those of Samudragupta. As usual, several identifications have been suggested for Kācha by scholars. A group of them led by R.D. Banerji held the view that Kācha was a rival brother of Samudragupta and occupied the throne for sometime between the reigns of Chandragupta I and Samudragupta. Goyal upholds this view with more reasoning and builds it up into an elaborate theory of a big ideological-factional conflict in the shape of a fratricidal succession war. In his scheme, Samudragupta represented the liberal aspect of Brāhmaṇic revival and was favourably inclined towards Buddhism and other heterodox faiths. He, therefore, received support of the liberal section of Gupta nobility and of the entire Lichchhavi nobility. Conservative Gupta nobles hostile to Buddhist and Lichchhavi unorthodoxy sided with Kācha and a mighty struggle between the two factions ensued out of which Samudragupta, who had also been chosen as successor by his father, emerged victorious. In support of this thesis Goyal has presented an impressive array of arguments comprising evidences and implications of Kācha's gold coins, the Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta, the Buddhist treatise called *Āryamañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, as well as Yuan Chwang's Travels.[33]

This thesis of Goyal is reported to have been accepted by V.K. Thakur (*JNSI*, XXXIX, 1977, pp.108-13).[34] R.C. Majumdar also seems to have partly agreed with Goyal's reconstruction.[35] Following P.L.

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[32] Agrawal, *Rise and Fall*, pp.93-95.

[33] Goyal, *Imperial Guptas*, pp. 122-28; 191-95.

[34] As mentioned in S.R. Goyal, *Guptakālīna Abhilekha* [Inscriptions of the Gupta Age] (Meerut: Kusumanjali Prakashan, 1984), p.27.

[35] Majumdar, R.C., (ed.), *A Comprehensive History of India*, Vol.3 Pt.1, (Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1981), p.19, fn.6.

Gupta, Goyal identifies Kācha with one 'Bhasma', the wicked brother of Samudra, mentioned in *ĀMMK*. R.C. Majumdar rejects this identification.[36] In fact, he is very critical of the authenticity and reliability of this late (8th-9th centuries) Mahāyāna work.[37] On the same ground S.K. Maity also refuses to conform to Goyal's thesis and rejects the *ĀMMK* evidence of a fratricidal war as "far-fetched." He would not even identify Kācha as a brother of Samudragupta, nor would he accept their contemporaneity.[38] Goyal, however, reiterated his contentions in two later publications.[39] Even then Ashvini Agrawal categorically rejects the entire story of Kācha and declares him as "identical with Samudragupta" whose "succession to the throne was undisputed and there was no war of succession."[40] He also refuses to identify 'Bhasma' of the *ĀMMK* with Kācha and assign him a place in Gupta history.[41]

C. IDENTITY OF KING 'CHANDRA' OF THE MEHARAULI PILLAR INSCRIPTION

As is well-known, one of the major problems of Gupta history is concerned with the identity of king "Chandra" whose achievements are recorded on the famous iron pillar of Meharauli which now stands in the premises of the Qwatul Islam mosque near the Qutb Minar, Delhi. Back in 1897 V.A. Smith identified 'Chandra' with Chandragupta II, but moved from this position in 1924 under H.P. Shastri's influence. However, it is Smith's original view that later received wider support from scholars such as D.C. Sircar (1939), G.R. Sharma (1945), R.K. Mookerji (1945), J.C. Joshi (1963) and others. Other identifications included those with Chandragupta Maurya (H.C. Seth 1937; B.P. Sinha 1943), Kanishka I (R.C. Majumdar 1943), and Chandragupta I (S.K. Ayangar 1928; R.G. Basak 1934). By the 1960's the issue seemed almost settled in favour of Chandragupta II.[42] Back in 1914 John Allan had remarked that some of the crucial statements of the Meharauli Pillar Inscription are more applicable to Samudragupta than to Chandragupta II. But he then declined to assign the document at all to the Gupta dynasty on metallurgical ground.[43] So when in the 1960's Professor Goyal identified 'Chandra' with Samudragupta, he actually committed an act of dissent. He first propounded his new theory in a Hindi article in 1962 to be followed by one in English in 1965 and finally in his doctoral dissertation published as *A History of the Imperial Guptas* in 1967. It immediately caught the attention of prominent scholars in the field and responses kept being expressed in learned works and papers over the years.

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[36] *Ibid.*, p.20.

[37] *Ibid.*, pp.100-01, fns. 49 and 50.

[38] Maity, *Imperial Guptas*, pp.26-27.

[39] (1) *Guptakālīna Abhilekah* [Inscriptions of the Gupta Age] (Meerut: Kusumanjali Prakashan, 1984).

(2) *Gupta āura Vākāṭaka Sāmrājyoṅ kā Yuga* [Age of the Gupta and Vākāṭaka Empires] (Meerut: Kusumanjali Prakashan, 1988).

[40] Agrawal, *Rise and Fall*, pp.104-06.

[41] *Ibid.*, pp.135-40.

[42] These informations regarding the identifications of 'Chandra' are found in Joshi, M.C., Gupta, S.K., and Goyal, Shankar (eds.), *King Chandra and the Meharauli Pillar*, Kusumanjali Problems of Indian History Series No.1, (Meerut: Kusumanjali Prakashan, 1989), pp.241-62.

Dr. Radhe Sharan fully endorsed Goyal's identification in his Hindi book on *Samrāṭ Samudragupta* [Emperor Samudragupta] published in 1969 where he even reconstructed the history of Samudragupta with the help of Goyal's theory.[44] Even R.C. Majumdar, who had earlier identified Chandra with Kanishka I, noted in the sixth revised edition of his *Ancient India* (1971, p.234 n.) that the new identification was "plausible." However, in *A Comprehensive History of India* (1981), while duly referring to Goyal's identification in a footnote, Majumdar observes that the generally accepted theory of 'Chandra''s identity with Chandragupta II is "undoubtedly the most plausible, but cannot be regarded as certain." [45] In 1982 Joanna G. Williams found Goyal's arguments "ingenious," although she renained steadfast in her belief that 'Chandra' was identical with Chandragupta II.[46] On the other hand, A.L. Basham, S.S. Rana, T.R. Sharma, N.P. Joshi and a few others, though obviously impressed by Goyal's arguments, declined to agree with him raising various objections.[47] Goyal's rejoinder came in 1984 in *Guptakālīna Abhilekha* [Inscriptions of the Gupta Age] where he reiterated his previous position with renewed determination.[48] In 1985 B.N. Mukherji expressed his faith in 'Chandra's identification with Chandragupta II.[49] Goyal returned with his defence once again in 1987 in his Hindi work *Gupta āura Vākāṭaka Sāmrājyoṅ kā Yuga* [Age of the

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[43] *Ibid.*, p.244.

[44] *Ibid.*, p.207.

[45] Majumdar, *Comprehensive History*, p.56.

[46] Williams, *The Art of Gupta India* (New Delhi: 1982), pp.26, 96. Quoted extracts in Joshi, Gupta and Goyal, *King Chandra*, pp.200.

[47] Joshi, Gupta and Goyal, *King Chandra*, pp.199-204.

[48] Goyal, *Guptakālīna Abhilekha*, pp.86-90.

[49] Joshi, Gupta and Goyal, *King Chandra*, p.263.

Gupta and Vākāṭaka Empires].[50] More recently Ashvini Agrawal has criticised Goyal's theory as expounded in *A History of the Imperial Guptas*, but he does not seem to have seen Goyal's rejoinder to critics in *Guptakālīna Abhilekha* and *Gupta āura Vākāṭaka Sāmrājyoṅ kā Yuga*. Agrawal categorically supports Chandragupta II's claim to be identical with king 'Chandra' of the Meharauli Pillar Inscription.[51] He also rejects Goyal's identification of Chandraprakāśa (mentioned by Vāmana, the 8th century Kashmiri rhetorician) with Samudragupta.[52]

Meanwhile the Publishers Kusumanjali Prakashan of Meerut, India, arranged a "seminar by correspondence" to find a solution to the problem of king 'Chandra''s identity. In response to Professor Goyal's lead paper (which had been first published in 1967 as Appendix III to Chapter 3 in *A History of the Imperial Guptas*) as many as twenty-four scholars sent their reaction papers. This testifies to the fact that Goyal's theory made a deep impression on scholars in the field. At least eleven responses went straightaway in favour of Goyal's position. Professor S.B. Deo of Deccan College Post-Graduate Research Institute appreciates Goyal's "analytical competence" and "logical reasoning" and agrees "whole-heartedly with his identification of King Chandra with Samudragupta."[53] Dr. R. Nagaswamy of Tamilnadu Archaeology Department finds Goyal's suggestion "refreshingly original" and is convinced that the identification of 'Chandra' with Samudragupta is now placed "beyond doubt."[54] Shri M.C. Joshi, presently Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India, finds "a sound case for supporting the thesis of S.R. Goyal."[55] Professor B.Ch. Chhabra, who had been a supporter of the Chandragupta II identity, is now satisfied that Professor Goyal "has shown convincingly that the Chandra of Meharauli inscription is to be identified with...Samudragupta."[56] Professor K.V. Raman of the University of Madras finds Goyal's line of argument "quite sound and convincing" and concedes Goyal's demand that his identification "should be regarded at least more probable than any other suggestion proposed so far."[57] Professor K.K. Sharma of the

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[50] Goyal, *Gupta aura Vākāṭaka Sāmrājyoṅ kā Yuga*, pp.177-85.

[51] Agrawal, *Rise and Fall*, pp.178-183.

[52] *Ibid.*, pp.141-42.

[53] Joshi, Gupta and Goyal, *King Chandra*, p.149.

[54] *Ibid.*, p.142.

[55] *Ibid.*, p.140.

[56] *Ibid.*, p.92.

[57] *Ibid.*, pp.122-23.

University of Meerut is "much impressed" by the "sharpness" and "soundness" of Goyal's "logical arguments and congratulates him on "suggesting an ingenious and most acceptable solution" to the problem.[58] Other supporters of Goyal's thesis include Dr. S.K. Gupta, Dr. S.N. Kapoor, and Dr. S.K. Purohit of the Universities of Rajasthan, Jodhpur, and Lucknow respectively.

Scholars, opposing Goyal's lead paper thesis are slightly more numerous than the supporters. They include B.P. Sinha, Lallanji Gopal, A.M. Shastri, K.D. Bajpai, Susmita Pande, V.S. Pathak, T.P. Verma, Upendra Thakur and others. These are all (except perhaps B.P. Sinha, who used to prefer Chandragupta Maurya) Chandragutpa II hardliners who found various flaws in Goyal's thesis. They have, however, met a formidable antithesis in Goyal's identification and have found it necessary to refute the same with intricate arguments. Seven of them[59] wholeheartedly subscribe to the traditional theory that 'Chandra' of the Meharauli Pillar Inscription is identical with Chandragupta II, while five others[60] provisionally accept this identification on the ground of more reasonability in the present stage of our knowledge. K.D. Bajpai thankfully describes Goyal's article as "thought provoking",[61] while S. Sankaranarayanan appreciates Goyal's initiative in settling the knotty problem.[62] Professors Lallanji Gopal and K.K. Gopal face "forceful pleading" in Goyal's theme paper.[63]

Two contributors have expressed undecided reaction to Goyal's thesis and have refrained from taking any side. Professor R.S. Mishra of Rajasthan University, Jaipur, realizes that "identification of Chandra is not possible beyond doubt" in the present state of things and historians may "wait for some conclusive evidence" to come. But on "personal faith" Mishra believes that the Meharauli iron pillar was erected by Samudragupta in connection with his *aśvamedha* sacrifice while Chandragupta II caused the inscription to be engraved on it.[64] We must, however, realize that this compromise is no synthesis of the contending positions. Shri K.G. Krishnan of the Archaeological Survey of India,

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[58] *Ibid.*, p.116.

[59] Jagannath Agrawal, K.D. Bajpai, K.K. Thaplyal, Lallanji Gopal, Krishna K. Gopal, S. Sankaranarayanan, and T.P. Verma.

[60] A.M. Shastri, Susmita Pande, Upendra Thakur, V.S. Pathak, and V.B. Rao.

[61] Joshi, Gupta and Goyal, *King Chandra*, p.111.

[62] *Ibid.*, p.179.

[63] *Ibid.*, p.124.

[64] *Ibid.*, p.147.

Mysore, feels that it is "hard to wrest history from inscriptions" which are full of poetic forms and fancies. Even though he observes that the difficulties stated by Professor Goyal in regard to 'Chandra' 's identification "are not as insurmountable as made out to be", he suspends his judgement until some "clinching evidence" comes forth.[65]

In a long reappraisal Professor Goyal has sought to refute his opponents' objections with new arguments and defend his previous position with more determination. In his defence he has put emphasis on relative worth of evidences. He observes that archaeological evidences, like epigraphic and numismatic ones, are more valuable than literary evidence.[66] He also distinguishes between four kinds of evidences such as positive, circumstantial, corroborative and explanatory with declining values in that order, the last category being "no evidence at all."[67] Then he proceeds to elaborate on his contention that king 'Chandra' 's military feats as recorded in the Meharauli Pillar Inscription have been attributed to Chandragupta II without the support of any positive evidence, while the same achievements can be assigned to Samudragupta on the basis of the positive evidence of the Allahabad Pillar Inscription.[68] It is needless to say that the 'positive' evidence is not as unmistakably positive as to catch the notice of every scholar. It has required extensive explanatory exercises by Professor Goyal in order to look like what he desires it to be. It may also be noted that it is on the same ground of positive evidence of "clear testimony" of the Allahabad Pillar Inscription that S.K. Maity rejects Goyal's *ĀMMK*-based idea of a succession war fought by Samudragupta and believes that the latter's accession to his father's throne was peaceful.[69] However, no one can deny that Goyal's arguments in respect of king Chandra's identity are most formidable and have confronted the traditional theory with the greatest challenge it has ever encountered. Thus, we see, the identity crisis is very much there and the controversy has received a new life thanks to Professor Goyal's researches. We must also observe that such statements of Goyal as "the military feats of

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[65] *Ibid.*, pp.112-14.

[66] *Ibid.*, p.209. But in this regard one may refer to R.C. Majumdar's (*Comprehensive History*, pp.100-01) and Ashvini Agrawal's (*Rise and Fall*, pp.39, 139-40) criticism of Goyal's extensive use of *Āryamañjuśrīmūlakalpa* to support his positions respectively on the post-Skandagupta history and on Kācha.

[67] *Ibid.*, p.210

[68] *Ibid.*, pp.210ff.

[69] Maity, *Imperial Guptas*, p.27.

Chandra...leave *no room to doubt* that he must be identified with Samudragupta"[70] and of Ashvini Agrawal as "the identity of Chandra...with Chandragupta II...stands *beyond all doubt*"[71] are too sweeping and lack proper justification. Juxtaposed together they only point to the fact that the question is still very much open and deserves more exploration. In this situation Goyal's earlier statement that "in the present state of our knowledge" the suggested identification of 'Chandra' with Samudragupta "should be regarded as at least more probable than any other suggestion proposed so far"[72] is a soberer and more reasonable conclusion that we can draw after reading the "seminar by correspondence" volume.

D. THE RĀMAGUPTA QUESTION

Since the discovery of some fragments of the lost Sanskrit drama *Devī-Chandraguptam* in 1923, the question of Rāmagupta's historicity and place emerged as a major problem of Gupta history. Some scholars accepted his historicity, while others refused to give credit to literary evidence. Some identified Rāmagupta with Kācha without much reason. R.C. Majumdar judiciously opined (in 1946) that the problem could not be solved until further evidence came to light. Discovery of the Vidiśā copper coins of Rāmagupta led to further speculations by scholars. D.C. Sircar and others still refused to acknowledge Rāmagupta as a Gupta emperor and relegated him to the position of a local ruler.[73] In this situation Goyal made a meticulous analysis of the literary symbolism used in the *Devī-Chandraguptam* to find a reconciliation with the numismatic evidence and arrived at the conclusion that at the death of emperor Samudragupta his younger son, Chandragupta II, somehow secured for himself the whole empire minus the province of Eastern Malwa where his elder brother Rāmagupta, being the legitimtae heir to the throne and, may be, the governor of the province, declared himself emperor. Shortly thereafter, in the wake of a Śaka invasion of the territory held by Rāmagupta, Chandragupta II, in the name of security of the Gupta empire, attacked and killed his elder brother and later married his widow, Dhruvadevī. This reconstruction, Goyal felt, was the closest to the truth.[74] S.K. Maity welcomed Goyal's reconstruction of the Rāmagupta episode as "very near the truth."[75] R.S. Mishra also appreciated Goyal's suggestion as a great help in resolving differences between literary and archaeological witnesses.[76] Meanwhile, the fateful discovery in 1969 of three Jain image inscriptions of Mahārājādhirāja Rāmagupta from Durjanpur in Eastern Malwa definitely proved both his historicity and imperial status, thus going a long way to vindicate Goyal's interpretation. It is, however, curious that R.C. Majumdar still refused to concede much modification of his position, except accepting Rāmagupta's historicity only in the light of the Durjanpur inscriptions and insisted that Chandragupta II must be regarded as the successor of Samudragupta "For all practical purposes".[77] Goyal naturally forcefully reiterated his position again in 1984[78] and 1987.[79] Writing as late as 1988 Ashvini Agarwal seems to have overlooked Goyal's reconstruction of the Rāmagupta episode and remains content with mere "historicity of Rāmagupta" as established by the discovery of the Durjanpur inscriptions, without bothering for his real place in the history of the imperial Guptas.[80]

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[70] Joshi, Gupta and Goyal, *King Chandra*, p. 237. Emphasis supplied.

[71] Agarwal, *Rise and Fall*, p. 182. Emphasis supplied

[72] Goyal, *Imperial Guptas*, p. 208.

[73] Referred to in Goyal, *Gupta aura Vākāṭaka*, p. 191.

[74] Goyal, *Imperial Guptas*, pp. 229-37.

E. THE GOVINDAGUPTA ISSUE

On the Govindagupta issue Professor Goyal has been less categorical and has cautiously left the question open. In *A History of the Imperial Guptas* he gives rather a short account of the controversy and comes to the conclusion that Govindagupta, a son of Chandragupta II, gathered administrative experiance as governor of Vaiśālī during his father's reign and was later transferred to Mandasor, Western Malwa, the most troublesome province of the empire. Goyal does not accept the views of Jagannath Agarwal and others that Govindagupta challenged the succession of Kumāragupta I and there was a war of succession. Although Goyal does not rule out the possibility of Govindagupta having ruled for a while as a paramount sovereign, but does not also feel safe with such a conclusion drawn on the basis of the evidence available to date.[81] This position of Goyal has found support with Joanna Williams.[82] S.K. Maity generally accepts Goyal's conclusion but believes that Govindagupta was "for sometime independent in Mandasor" as a rebel.[83] B.P. Sinha seems to have agreed with Goyal on the whole and mentions Govindagupta as governor of Vaiśālī, later transferred to Western Malwa where he grew menacingly influential during his brother's (i.e. Kumāragupta I's) reign.[84] R.C. Majumdar concedes that Govindagupta might have enjoyed a short reign but he prefers to place it between the death of Kumāragupta I and the accession of Skandagupta.[85]

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[75] Maity, *Imperial Guptas*, pp. 36-37.

[76] Referred to in Goyal, *Gupta aura Vākāṭaka*, p. 199.

[77] Majumdar, *Comprehensive History*, p. 51.

[78] Goyal, *Guptakālina Abhilikha*, pp. 93-98.

[79] Goyal, *Gupta aura Vākāṭaka*, pp.186-99.

[80] Agrawal, *Rise and Fall*, 157-59.

[81] Goyal, *Imperial Guptas*, pp.253-55.

[82] Referred to in Goyal, *Gupta aura Vākāṭaka*, p.251.

In *Gupta āura Vākāṭaka Sāmrājyoṅ kā Yuga* (1988) Goyal deals with the question with greater detail and reiterates his previous position with better clarity. In consonance with several others he believes that Govindagupta was a governor of Western Malwa under Kumāragupta I. He then opposes, on technical ground, R.C. Majumdar's view that Govindagupta might have assumed supreme sovereignty for a while after Kumāragupta I's reign. This means, if Govindagupta was a governor both under his father and brother, he was never a paramount ruler. Finally, Goyal prefers to leave the question of Govindagupta's real place in Gupta history open till new evidence comes to light.[86] However, without any such fundamental change in the source situation, Ashvini Agarwal upholds the older theory that Govindagupta was an imperial monarch who enjoyed a very short reign between 412-13 and 415-16 A.D.[87]

F. GUPTA GENEALOGY AFTER SKANDAGUPTA

Succession of Gupta emperors after Skandagupta is beset with a number of difficulties, the foremost being the identity and dates of Narasiṁhagupta Bālāditya and Kumāragupta Kramāditya. Position and dates of Purugupta, Vainyagupta, and Bhānugupta in the dynastic history also present an impasse. In *A History of the Imperial Guptas* Professor Goyal undertook a thorough and critical examination of the whole problem and its various solutions offered by scholars. Then he gave his own reconstruction of the genealogy and chronology of later Gupta emperors by postulating the existence of two Narasiṁhagupta Bālādityas and, as their respective sons and successors, two Kumāragupta Kramādityas.[88] S.K. Maity, after a review of older theories, has accepted Goyal's reconstruction almost wholly.[89] Joanna Williams has also approved the central idea of Goyal's suggestion.[90] R.C. Majumdar seems to have been impressed by Goyal's sugession but does not endorse it on the ground of certain chronological difficulties and Goyal's too much reliance on the authority of the *Āryamañjuśrī-mūlakalpa*.[91] B.P. Sinha rejects Goyal's reconstruction as "based on a number of a priori assumptions and often without any supporting evidence."[92] He particularly attacks the theory of two Narasiṁhagupta Bālādityas[93] and disapproves Goyal's extensive use of the *ĀMMK* in his arguments.[94]

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[83] Maity, *Imperial Guptas*, pp.51-52.

[84] Sinha, B.P., *Dynastic History of Magadha* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1977), pp.7-8.

[85] Majumdar, *Comprehensive History*, p.66.

[86] Goyal, *Gupta aura Vākāṭaka*, pp.247-52.

[87] Agrawal, *Rise and Fall*, p.189.

Professor Goyal came up with his answer to critics in his *Gupta āura Vākāṭaka Sāmrājyoṅ kā Yuga* (1988) where he restated his older position with more intricate arguments. He again makes significant use of the *ĀMMK* and defends himself on the ground that literary evidence on ancient Indian political history is very rare and as such the *ĀMMK* should not be rejected straight away and that its evidence has been carefully checked against that of other sources.[95] Ashvini Agrawal does not seem to be aware of Goyal's reconstruction of Gupta genealogy; but he does not accept the theory of two Narasiṁhaguptas as put forward earlier by A.S. Altekar and generally remains closer to B.P. Sinha's position.[96]

Professor Goyal's arguments are undoubtedly strong, but they do not seem to be conclusive and, therefore, have not received wide acceptance. The existence of two emperors with the same name (Narasiṁhagupta) and the same *birud* (Bālāditya), both having been equally "tranformed" by the baneful influence of Buddhism, and both having a son bearing the same name (Kumāragupta) succeeding his father with the same *birud* (Kramāditya) is extremely unusual. The relationship of Bhānugupta with his predecessors is yet to be established. The theories of Goyal's rivals also do not stand all criticisms. On the whole, we must say that the genealogical problem of later day imperial Guptas remains as unsolved as it has been so long and their chronology is still in disarray. This is due solely to the lack of conclusive evidence. Goyal's efforts represent the most meticulous research on the subject and no further progress is possible without the discovery of new evidence.

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[88] Goyal, *Imperial Guptas*, pp.314-34, 370-86, 402.

[89] Maity, *Imperial Guptas*, pp.67-68.

[90] Williams, Joanna G., *The Art of Gupta India* (New Delhi: 1983), p.65. As referred to in Goyal, *Gupta āura Vākāṭaka*, p.327.

[91] Majumdar, *Comprehensive History*, pp.78-101.

[92] Sinha, *Dynastic History*, p.54.

[93] *Ibid.*, p.59.

[94] See *ibid.*, pp.49-63 and fns. on pp.73, 76-77.

[95] Goyal, *Gupta āura Vākāṭaka*, pp.312-27.

[96] Agrawal, *Rise and Fall*, pp.220-49.

G. DECLINE AND FALL OF THE GUPTA EMPIRE

One of the major contributions of Professor Goyal to the study of Gupta history is a more sophisticated explanation of the fall of the Gupta empire than hitherto advanced by scholars. He identifies feudal-federal structure of the empire and the influence of the pacifist ideology of Buddhism during the later phase as two key factors that combined with external onslaughts of the Hūṇas and the Pushyamitras to hasten the demise of the empire in the sixth century. His theory about the role of Buddhism in the transformation of the empire leading to its ultimate fall is of particular interest. The transformation had, as Goyal perceives, two distinct phases. First, under the impact of the "Gupta Peace" life in the empire during Chandragupta II's rule was marked by a luxurious enjoyment of art, music, dance, drinking, fashion and gaiety which led to "a softening in the martial fervour of the Gupta emperors."[97] Conversely, from the later years of Kumāragupta I's rule an opposite trend paradoxically accelerated the same process of dampening the military vigour of the Gupta ruling house. It was the ascetic ideology in its Buddhist form, more specifically the "life-negating and world-renouncing esoteric doctrines of...later Buddhism" that "eventually sucked the Gupta emperors dry of their martial fervour and capacity for administering their subordinates with strength and determination."[98]

This sensitive theory of Professor Goyal has not, however, provoked much reaction from scholars since its first propagation in 1967. It has neither received hearty acceptance nor suffered effective refutation by later writers most of whom have preferred to keep silence about it. S.K. Maity, who is generally affirmative of Goyal's reinterpretation of Gupta history, has quoted Goyal approvingly in his own explanation of the decline and fall of the Gupta empire, but has refrained from making any comment on the theory of Buddhist pacifism contributing to the imperial catastrophe.[99] Romila Thapar writing in 1975 seems to be unaware of Goyal's theory and marks the centrifugal tendency of Gupta feudalism, and the Hūṇa avalanche as the chief causes of the collapse of the Gupta state.[100] Similarly, R.C. Majumdar, despite making many references to Goyal's *A History of the Imperial Guptas*, remains silent about the influence of Buddhism on later Gupta emperors or any ideological cause of their downfall. He puts emphasis on "internal decay" and divisive localism rather than the Hūṇa invasions to explain the empire's disintegration.[101] Ashvini Agrawal finds no ideological factor but internal dissension, rebellions, and feudatory insubordination working behind the decay and demise of the Gupta state.[102] These silences unmistakably points to the formidable nature of Goyal's arguments.

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[97] Goyal, *Imperial Guptas*, pp.250-52. The quote, p.251.

[98] *Ibid.*, p.368. See also pp.292-95, 348-49, 353-54.

[99] Maity, *Imperial Guptas*, pp.69-82.

B.P. Sinha, a determined opponent of Goyal, has however protested against the latter's introduction of Buddhism as a key factor in the history of Gupta inability to save their empire from the onslaughts of rebels and invaders. While acknowledging the later Gupta emperors' inflated interest in Buddhism, Sinha finds no reason to believe that the religion's influence had anything to do with the loss of military vigour of its royal patrons and followers.[103] Reacting to Sinha's criticism Goyal, in *Gupta āura Vākāṭaka Sāmrājyoṅ kā Yuga*, rightly points out that the learned critic has not disproved the evidences put forward by him to support his theory.[104] In this work and in *Gupta Sāmrājya kā Itihāsa* (1987) Goyal has reasserted his doctrine. In reaction, Professor David Lorenzen perceives Goyal's emphasis on the pacifist impact of Buddhism to be "overdrawn" and points to the lack of direct evidence proving that profession of Buddhism and Jainism ever made any ancient Indian ruler (with the possible exception of Aśoka) "neglect military activity or soften criminal justice."[105] B.P. Sinha also points out that early Pāla rulers, who were devout Buddhists, never showed loss of military vigour.[106] We may also note that the influence of Buddhism did not prevent Skandagupta from becoming "the unique hero of the Gupta dynasty."[107] Buddhist pacifism also did not work against the incessant fratricidal strife within the Gupta family in which Skandagupta and Budhagupta took part. A general decadence rather than Buddhist or any lofty ideal seems to have occupied the character and personality of later Gupta emperors.

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[100] Thaper, Romila, 'Aśokan India and the Gupta Age,' in Basham, A.L., (ed.), *Cultural History of India* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp.46-50.

[101] Majumdar, *Comprehensive History*, pp.105-07.

[102] Agrawal, *Rise and Fall*, pp.264-69.

[103] Sinha, *Dynastic History*, pp.71-72.

[104] Goyal, *Gupta aura Vākāṭaka*, pp.382-84.

[105] Lorenzen, 'Professor Goyal's Suggestion on Political History Writing', pp.53-54.

[106] Sinha, *Dynastic History*, p.72.

Since the Gupta empire, according to Professor Goyal, was the political expression of a gigantic Brāhmaṇic revival in North India against heterodox systems such as Buddhism, it would have been an ideological self-negation on the part of later Gupta emperors to serve the cause of Buddhism. The reasons of such fundamental deviation are not clear at all. Since Buddhism, unlike Christianity in the declining Roman Empire, was on the ebb in India and the people at large were fast returning to the reviving Brāhmaṇic culture, a pro-Brāhmaṇa *coup d'etat* or a popular upsurge against the renegade emperors would have been a most natural consequence. Despite Goyal's depiction of Buddhist obsession of the later emperors, their personal names such as Kumāra, Skanda, Narasiṁha, Budha, Bhānu, and Vishṇu remained emphatically Brāhmaṇic (Śaiva and Vaishṇava) and so did their respective *biruds* (ending with āditya = Sun, a Saura element). A general ascendency of Buddhism in the ruling house, one wonders, would have had its impact on the names and titles of princes and emperors.

Lorenzen, however, accepts Goyal's argument concerning financial drain caused by permanent donation of tax revenues to the Buddhist monasteries, but seeks to modify it by putting equal importance to extensive financial allowances to Brāhmaṇic institutions also.[108] Sinha, on the other hand, makes a similar generalization by pointing out that self-negating ascetic ideology is nothing peculiar to Buddhism alone but a common heritage of all ancient Indian religions including the Brāhmaṇic.[109] Goyal himself also acknowledges the role of Brāhmaṇic ideals and institutions in the feudalization and ultimate disintegration of the empire. He duly takes into account the financial drain caused by patronage to Brāhmaṇic institutions and individuals. But he accusingly mentions the name of Buddhism too often with the effect that the part played by Brāhmaṇism in the history of the Gupta decline is misrepresented as a rather secular factor. Thus, it is the element of religion (rather than Buddhism or any particular denomination) present in Gupta ideology, administration and finances that should be examined in connection with the decay and demise of the empire.

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[107] Goyal, *Imperial Guptas*, p.273.
[108] Lorenzen, 'Professor Goyal's Suggestion on Political History Writing', pp.54-55.
[109] Sinha, *Dynastic History*, p.72.

The nature and structure of Hinduism should also be taken into consideration in understanding the rise and fall of the Gupta empire. Being highly plural in social and intellectual content, Hinduism, unlike such unitary ideologies founded by one person as Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity, Islam and Marxism, is not a suitable ideology for a unitary empire. The Mauryan monolith, therefore, sought in Buddhism, rather than in Brāhmaṇism, a fitting ideology to embrace and uphold. Being Hindu in origin and ethos the Gupta empire naturally grew as a plural entity and developed such features as a feudal structure, a policy of religious toleration, only nominal subordination demanded from vassal rulers, and extensive local autonomy. This pervasive pluralism in an age of general decay naturally pulled down the frail imperial structure and Hindu plurality again found fulfilment in political fragmentation. The Gupta empire seems to be a brilliant Hindu experiment in unity-in-plurality which ultimately failed due to the incongruity of dynastic imperialism with decentralization and diversity. Yet, the Gupta empire flourished for nearly two centuries, quite a long time for the Indian situation, and then disappeared to leave a splendid cultural, intellectual, social and ideological legacy.

VI

CONCLUSION

Between 1967 and 1989 Professor S.R. Goyal has published as many as six books on the history of the Guptas. These are:

1. *A History of the Imperial Guptas* (1967)
2. *Gupta evaṁ Samakālīna Rājavaṁśa* (1969)
3. *Guptakālīna Abhilekha* (1984)
4. *Samudragupta Parākramāṅka* (1987)
5. *Gupta Sāmrājya kā Itihāsa* (1987)
6. *Gupta aura Vākāṭaka Sāmrājyoṅ kā Yuga* (1988)

Apart from these he has authored a large number of articles on different aspects of Gupta history and has written on the Gupta age in his numerous books on ancient India. He is primarily a political historian but has shown competence in writing religious and cultural history also. The first three works mentioned above are his original contribution on the Gupta period and the later works largely reproduce what was said in the first one.

Goyal put forward his chief contentions in *A History of the Imperial Guptas* and the book provoked comments from scholars of Indology across the world. Professor Eleanor Zelliot of Minnesota, USA, described the work as "a model of historiography" and A.L. Basham as "the best analysis of the period." R.C. Majumdar found in it "many suggestions which are very plausible and refreshing." In the foregoing pages we have seen how these "suggestions" and contentions have received appreciation or repudiation from scholars writing on Gupta history in subsequent years. This fact proves that Goyal's publication of *A History of the Imperial Guptas* in 1967 is not only a landmark in modern historiography of the Gupta empire, but a watershade between two ages of scholarship. Prior to that date Gupta history was marked by (1) "what happened?" approach, (2) disintegrated aspectual studies, and (3) emotional interpretations to satisfy such sentiments as imperialism, nationalism, and Marxism. Against this background Goyal presented his "model of historiography" characterized with (1) "why did it happen?" approach, (2) integrated study of an aspect as it is related to the whole context and (3) source-based interpretation with a controlled nationalist bias.

This new approach and its results definitely created a stir in the world of scholarship and older writers hurried either to refute Goyal's conclusions or modify their own in the light of his suggestions. Younger writers have often been deeply impressed and are sometimes carried away. Naturally, all the solutions offered by Goyal to various problems of Gupta history have not been approved, but his basic concept and ideal of historiography do remain unchallenged. This stability has made him an authority on Gupta history and his constant research in the area and successive publications mark him off as the foremost historian of the Gupta empire. However, Goyal is yet to lead a school of historiography, although his achievements and his philosophy of (ancient Indian) history warrant such a possibility.

3

S.R. Goyal on the Chronology of the Gupta Dynasty

Alka Goyal

The chronology of the Gupta dynasty is full of interesting problems. Dr. S.R. Goyal, who has now become well-known for his integral approach to political history, first propounded in his doctoral thesis entitled *A History of the Imperial Guptas* (Allahabad, 1967) in which political events are to be studied against the background of various factors and forces operating in society, has also made many valuable suggestions regarding the chronological problems of Gupta history.

The chronology of the early Guptas is far from settled. The date of the establishment of the Gupta dynasty is still a controversial question. R.K. Mookerji[1] and B.G. Gokhale[2] have placed the establishment of the Gupta dynasty in c.240 A.D., Basak[3] in c.275 A.D. and Altekar[4] and Smith[5] in c.270 and c.271 A.D. respectively. The identity of the founder of the Gupta era and the initial year of the reign of Samudragupta, variously placed from 319 A.D. to c.350 A.D., are also yet to be satisfactorily determined. Relying on the testimony of the Gayā charter of Samudragupta, usually regarded as spurious, Dandekar[6] and R.D. Banerji[7] suggest that Samudragupta was ruling in 328 A.D. Majumdar[8] finds much to support the view that Samudragupta began to rule either in 319 A.D. or c.350 A.D. The latter date has been accepted by

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[1] Mookerji, R.K., *The Gupta Empire*, Bombay, 1948, p.11.

[2] Gokhale, B.G., *Samudragupta and His Times*, Bombay, 1962, p.24.

[3] Basak, R.G., *History of North-Eastern India*, Calcutta, 1934, p.6.

[4] Altekar, A.S., *Catalogue of the Gupta Gold Coins in the Bayana Hoard*, Bombay, 1954, Intro., p.x.

[5] Smith, V.A., *Early History of India*, Oxford, 1924, p.345.

[6] Dandekar, R.N., *A History of the Guptas*, Poona, 1941, p.44.

[7] Banerji, R.D., *The Age of the Imperial Guptas*, Benaras, 1933, p.8.

[8] Majumdar, R.C. and Altekar, A.S., *A New History of the Indian People*, Vol.VI, Delhi, 1960, pp.158 ff.

Gokhale[9] and Chattopadhyaya[10] while Sircar[11] and Smith[12] are in favour of 330 A.D. A certain amount of loose thinking has also been done on this question. For example, Allan has placed the accession of Chandragupta I in 320 A.D. and holds that he married Kumāradevī *after* conquering Vaiśālī and yet he has placed the accession of Samudragupta in c.335 A.D. when Samudragupta could not have been more than 14 years old.[13] At one time Raychaudhuri held that Chandragupta I ascended the throne in 320 and strengthened his position by a matrimonial alliance with the Lichchhavis and yet he accepted the possibility that Samudragupta might have ascended the throne in 325 A.D.[14] The identity of the founder of the Gupta era and the event it commemorates are also highly debated questions. According to the usually accepted view the era was founded by Chandragupta I and dates from his accession or the assumption of the imperial title by him.[15] But this is not beyond doubt. The first known date in Gupta era is the year 56, the date of the accession of Chandragupta II. Now, it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that the era was initiated by either Gupta or Ghaṭotkacha and that the first three or four generations ruled for 56 years. But as Gupta and Ghaṭotkacha were rulers of no significance it would not be plausible to give them the credit of founding an era. But the case of Samudragupta is altogether different. As pointed out by R.C. Majumdar, "it is likely that the era dated from the accession of Samudragupta, the greatest of the Gupta emperors. This would be regarded as almost certain if the Nālandā charter of the 5th year be regarded as a genuine grant of Samudragupta, or even a late copy of genuine grant."[16] But if the contents of the Nālandā grant are genuine, we have to accept that Samudragupta was ruling in 324 A.D. It would then mean "that three generations of the Gupta rulers reigned for at least 131 years, and there can be hardly any objection to the addition of five years to this total by regarding Samudragupta as the founder of the era."[17]

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[9] Gokhale, *op.cit.*, p.32.

[10] Chattopadhyaya, S., *Early History of North India*, Calcutta, 1958, p.148.

[11] Sircar, D.C., *Select Inscriptions*, Vol.I, Calcutta, 1942, p.254.

[12] Smith, *op.cit.*

[13] Allan, J., *Catalogue of the Coins of the Gupta Dynasties and of Śaśāṅka, King of Gauda (in the British Museum)*. London, 1914, Intro., pp.xix-xx, xxxii.

[14] Raychaudhuri, H.C., *Political History of Ancient India*, Calcutta, 1953, pp.445, 446.

[15] Banerji, R.D., *op.cit.*, p.8; Dandekar, *op.cit.*, p.16; Basak, *op.cit.*, p.18; Mookerji, *op.cit.*, p.15 f.

[16] *Op.cit.*, p.159.

[17] *Ibid.*

The authenticity of the Nālandā and the Gayā records of Samudragupta is quite doubtful. Goyal believes that "they are late copies of the genuine records of Samudragupta in which a few damaged lines of upper portions, containing the genealogy and the epithets of Samudragupta were restored with the help of the similar records of his successors. In other words, except for the genealogical portions, the rest of the contents of the two documents, containing the names of the villages granted and of the donees as well as the dates and the names of the officers may be accepted as genuine."[18] But he points out that, contrary to the contention of R.C. Majumdar, the authenticity of the date of the Nālandā grant does not prove that Samudragupta was ruling in 324 A.D. due to the simple fact that its date cannot be referred to the Gupta era. It is not generally realized that when this grant was issued Chandragupta II was old enough to participate in the administrative work of the empire, for he has been mentioned (according to Sircar as the *dūtaka* of the deed) in the last line of this record. Obviously, therefore, he was not less than twenty years of age. But it is almost impossible to hold that Chandragupta II, who ascended the throne in 376 A.D., led a military campaign personally towards the close of his reign, and ruled up to atleast 413 A.D., was born in c.304 A.D. It has, therefore, to be accepted that the dates given in the Nālandā and the Gayā records are the regnal years of Samudragupta, and not his dates in the Gupta era.[19] From this, following S. Chattopadhyaya and P.L. Gupta,[20] Goyal concludes that Samudragupta did not use the Gupta era in the early years of his reign; instead he mentioned his regnal year. And as he has not used this era in the Allahabad pillar inscription and also in the available portion of the fragmentary Eran inscription, both engraved towards the close of his reign, it follows that he did not know anything about this era throughout his life. It obviously means that the era was founded after his death by his successor Chandragupta II in whose Mathurā inscription of the G.E. 61 it is found used for the first time. He evidently reckoned it from some earlier important event of the history of his dynasty. Goyal points out that in this Mathurā inscription the regnal years of Chandragupta II as well as his date in the Gupta era have been given, possibly because the people were as yet not accustomed to the new era. The retrospective reckoning of eras is not unknown in India. The eras associated with the names of the Buddha, Mahāvīra, and Vikrama originated long after the events which they commemorate. Akbar commenced his Ilāhī era in the 29th year of his reign but reckoned it from the date of his accession. In modern times the era of Dayanand, introduced long after his death, was reckoned from his birth.

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[18] Goyal, S.R., *A History of the Imperial Guptas*, Allahabad, 1967, p.105.

[19] *Op.cit.*, p.105 f.

[20] Chattopadhyaya, S., *op.cit.*, p.144; Gupta, P.L., *JBRS* XLII, March 1956, pp.72 ff.; *ibid.*, XLIX, Pt.I-IV, pp.74 ff.

However, in recent years Goyal is in revisionist mood, for in his *Guptakālīna Abhilekha* (1984) and *Gupta Sāmrājya kā Itihāsa* (1987) he has drawn attention of scholars to the Mandargiri cave inscription of the year 30, the Mundeshvari inscription of the same year and Bodh Gayā inscription of the year 64. He feels that as these records, on palaeographical grounds, belong to the fourth century A.D. and the dates given in them are, almost certainly, not the regnal years of any king, they must be referred to an era. And the only era the 30th and 64th years of which would fall in the fourth century A.D. is the Gupta era. Therefore, it becomes highly likely that the Gupta era was in existence in 319+30=349 A.D. In view of this likelihood the traditional view that it was initiated by Chandragupta I becomes quite plausible.

Be that as it may, according to Goyal Chandragupta II was not less than twenty years old in the fifth regnal year of his father. From this datum Goyal proceeds further. He argues that Chandragupta II was not more than forty years old at the time of his accession, for otherwise his love overtures to and subsequent marriage with Dhruvadevī and his personal participation in his military adventures towards the close of the fourth or in the beginning of the fifth century A.D. mentioned in the Udayagiri cave inscription of his minister Vīrasena will become incongruous and inexplicable. The depiction of his supple and youthful body on his coins also suggests that he was not very old at the time of his accession. Therefore, one may reasonably hold that he was born not earlier than 335 A.D. On the other hand, his birth cannot be placed much later than this. The marriage of his daughter Prabhāvatīguptā, begotten on his Nāga wife Kuberanāgā, with the Vākāṭaka prince Rudrasena II took place in c.380 A.D. According to a literary tradition, Pravarasena II, the youngest son of the union spent his early youth in pursuits of pleasure as he could rely upon his maternal grandfather (Chandragupta II) to look after his administration. Therefore, Pravarasena II must have become a major before the death of Chandragupta II in c.414 A.D. The birth of the former may, thus, be placed in c.390 A.D. "He was at least the second if not the third or fourth child of his parents, and so their marriage may be placed in c.380 A.D." This obviously means that Prabhāvatī was born sometime before 365 A.D. and that Chandragupta II married Kuberanāgā not much later than 360 A.D. But, if he was of marriageable age in 360 A.D., his birth must have taken place sometime before 340 A.D. "Thus, we find that we can place his birth neither much earlier nor much later than 335 A.D.; and, therefore, this date may be regarded as quite near the truth."[21] It is a very significant fact, Goyal argues, for if Chandragupta II was born in c.335 A.D. and was not less than twenty years old in the fifth regnal year of Samudragupta, as the Nālandā grant suggests, the date of the accession of the latter will fall not earlier than 350 A.D. If Chandragupta II was more than twenty years when the Nālandā grant was issued, the date of the accession of Samudragupta, will go up accordingly. But in view of his extensive conquests, Samudragupta should be allotted a period of not less than two decades. Therefore, the year 350 A.D. for his accession may be regarded as quite near the truth.[22]

In support of his suggestion that Samudragupta ascended the throne in c.350 A.D. Goyal gives several other proofs. Firstly, he argues that a study of the relative chronology of the Nāgās, the Vākāṭakas and the Guptas provides a positive indication in favour in 350 A.D. as the probable date of Samudragupta's accession. It is generally admitted that the Vākāṭaka emperor Pravarasena I ruled up to c.335 A.D.[23] In the royal house of the Bhārasiva Nāgās of Padmāvatī, Pravarasena's contemporary was Bhavanāga, the father-in-law of Gautamīputra, the son of Pravarasena I. It is usually believed that Bhavanāga outlived Pravarasena I. Altekar has placed the death of Bhavanāga in c.340 A.D.[24] Now, points out Goyal, when Samudragupta ascended the throne and launched his famous campaign against the Nāgas, Bhavanāga was already dead, for it is Nāgasena (who, according to Bāṇa, was the ruler of Padmāvatī), and not Bhavanāga, who figures among the kings of Āryāvarta who were uprooted by Samudragupta. It is obvious, therefore, that Samudragupta's early wars were fought some time after 340 A.D. How much later than this, it is difficult to determine; but in view of the fact that Nāgasena ruled for some time after the death of

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[21] Goyal, S.R., *op.cit.*, p.107 f.

[22] R.C. Majumdar (*A Comprehensive History of India*, Vol.III, Pt.I, New Delhi, 1981, p.37) also places Samudragupta's accession in c.350 A.D.

[23] *A New History of the Indian People*, Vol.VI, p.95.

[24] *Ibid.*, p.38 f.

Bhavanāga and before the invasion of Samudragupta, an interval of a decade or so may be easily postulated.

Secondly, according to the *ĀMMK* Samudragupta ruled for 22 years and 5 months.[25] If this is correct, we have to place the accession of Samudragupta in c.353 A.D., for we know that Chandragupta II ascended the throne in 376 A.D.

With the help of the conclusions that Samudragupta ascended the throne in c.350 A.D. and Chandragupta II was about fifteen years old at the time of Samudragupta's accession, Goyal reconstructs the chronology of the predecessors of Samudragupta. He reasons that if Chandragupta II was born in c.335 A.D. and had an elder brother in Rāmagupta, then Samudragupta's marriage could not have taken place much later than 330 A.D.; and if Samudragupta became of marriageable age in that year, his birth must have taken place not later than the latter half of the first decade of the fourth century A.D. Consequently, it can be assumed that the marriage of Chandragupta I with Kumāradevī, the Lichchhavi princess, was celebrated not later than 305 A.D. It would mean that the event from which the era was reckoned was neither the accession of Samudragupta and nor the marriage of Chandragupta I with Kumāradevī. Chandragupta II reckoned it probably from the date of the accession of Chandragupta I, the first *Mahārājādhirāja* of the dynasty or from the date of the assumption of the imperial status by the latter. It may be that both these events took place simultaneously. Further, if Chandragupta I ruled from 319 A.D., it may be easily presumed that his father Ghaṭotkacha and grandfather Gupta ruled in the two decades or a little more preceding his accession. In view of the fact that the four generations, from Chandragupta I to Kumāragupta I, ruled for 135 years, it does not appear probable that the first two kings, Gupta and Ghaṭotkacha, ruled for long periods. Goyal, therefore, concludes that the king Gupta ruled from c.295 to c.300 A.D. and his son Ghaṭotkacha from c.300 to 319 A.D.[26]

Goyal does not give any dates for Kācha and Rāmagupta, for he maintains that they ruled as the rebellious brothers respectively of Samudragupta and Chandragupta II and as such their reign-periods must fall within the reigns of Samudragupta and Chandragupta II. About Govindagupta, he is not certain whether or not this prince ruled as an independent king.

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[25] Jayaswal, K.P., *An Imperial History of India in a Sanskrit Text*, Lahore, 1934, p.48 f.

[26] Goyal, S.R., *op.cit.*, p.109 f.

About Purugupta also Goyal has supported the theory that he was a rebellious brother of Skandagupta whose reign must fall within the reign of Skandagupta. Most scholars opine that the death of Kumāragupta I took place in 455 A.D. (his last known date) and after ascending the throne in that year Skandagupta fought his enemies in 455-57 A.D.[27] B.P. Sinha[28] even holds that there is no proof that Skandagupta had ascended the throne in 455 A.D. According to him the Junagadh *praśasti*, engraved in 456 A.D., only proves that Skandagupta was ruling in that year; it does not prove that he was ruling in 455 also when the dam of the Sudarśana lake burst open. He has, therefore, put the accession of Skandagupta in 456, and between 455 (the last known date of Kumāragupta I) and 456, he has placed the reign of Purugupta. In his doctoral thesis published in 1967 Goyal raised objections against this theory and suggested that Skandagupta was not only ruling in 455 A.D. but had fought some of his wars when Kumāragupta I was still alive. In his *Gupta Sāmrājya kā Itihāsa* (Meerut, 1987) he has elaborated this theory and given very cogent reasons to prove that by 455 A.D., when the dam of the Sudarśana lake burst open, Skandagupta had not only ascended the throne, but had already fought all the wars recorded in the Junagadh *praśasti* and had become the master of the entire empire. He points out that according to this *praśasti* before the dam burst open in the month of Praushṭhapada of 136 G.E. (455 A.D.), Chakrapālita had worked for sometime as the city-magistrate of Girinagara, and Chakrapālita was appointed in that capacity by Parṇadatta whom Skandagupta had sent as governor of Surāshṭra. The last event, therefore, must have taken place long before the month of Praushṭhapada of 136 G.E. The *praśasti* also explicitly states that Skandagupta appointed Parṇadatta as governor of Surāshṭra *after* he had appointed governors in all the other provinces of the empire (*sarveshu deśeshu vidhāya goptṛn*) which he did *after* he had established his suzerainty over 'the entire world' (*evam sa jivā pṛthivīṁ samagrām*). The *praśasti* also graphically describes how he crushed his enemies and rivals before he rightfully claimed to have conquered the earth. Thus, the *praśasti* makes it quite explicit that he had fought all his wars described in it and had become lord paramount long before 455 A.D., that is long before the last known date of Kumāragupta I. This conclusion of Goyal is highly significant and makes it necessary to reconstruct afresh the history of the last years of Kumāragupta I and early years of Skandagupta's reign.

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[27] *E.g.* Gupta, P.L., *Gupta Sāmrājya*, Varanasi, 1970, p.180.

[28] Sinha, B.P., *The Decline of the Kingdom of Magadha*, Patna, 1954, pp.45-46; *cf.* his *Dynastic History of Magadha*, New Delhi, 1977, p.15.

Goyal has prepared a new order of succession after Skandagupta. It is based on his well-reasoned theory that Narasiṁhagupta Bālāditya I, the successor of Skandagupta, was different from Narasiṁhagupta Bālāditya II, the contemporary of Mihirakula. As regards the date of the end of the Gupta rule, Goyal feels that the Jaina tradition recorded in *Harivaṁśa Purāṇa* of Jinasena, according to which the Gupta empire collapsed 231 years after the Gupta era, that is in 550-51 A.D., appears to be quite correct, for "the Amauna copper plate of Mahārāja Nandana dated in the Gupta are 232 (551 A.D.), instead of mentioning the name of the Gupta overlord, mentions Nandana's *guru* indicating thereby that at that time there was no Gupta emperor worth the name on the throne. On the other hand, we find that Īśānavarman, the fourth king of the house of Mukhara, assumed the title of *Mahārājādhirāja* not far removed from 554 A.D., the date of the Haraha inscription, in which his exploits have been described. Therefore, the tradition that the Gupta empire collapsed in 550-51 A.D. may be regarded as substantially correct."[29]

Goyal also points out that in certain parts of the eastern India, the scions of the imperial Gupta family continued to rule for some years more, for another Jaina work *Tiloya-paññati* of Jadivasaha at one place states that the Guptas ruled for 231 years but elsewhere records that the Śakas ruled for 242 years and the Guptas for 255 years. It means that the Guptas ruled up to 574-75 A.D. It has been rightly suggested by D.C. Sircar that as "the two traditions, viz. the one giving the duration of the Gupta rule as 231years and the other speaking of 255 years in place of 231, are found in the same work and are not separated by a wide gap, it is permissible to think that the author had in view two altogether different traditions on the same subject."[30] That the tradition giving 255 years for the duration of the Gupta rule may also be correct is proved by the Sumaṇḍala inscription[31] according to which Gupta suzerainty was acknowledged in the Ganjam region of Orissa as late as the Gupta year 250=569 A.D. It is not impossible, therefore, to think that some unknown scions of the imperial Gupta family continued to rule in some parts of Bengal and Orissa up to 574-75 A.D.

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[29] Goyal, S.R., *op.cit.*, p.384.

[30] In *Essays Presented to Sir Jadunath Sarkar*, p.347.

[31] *EI*, XXVIII, pp.79-85.

In all, Goyal's researches in Gupta history have provided a much more dependable and arguable chronological framework than was available earlier for putting its historical events in proper context.*

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*I am grateful to my husband Shri Shankar Goyal, M.A., for giving me help in writing this paper.

4

Historians and the Gupta Empire

David N. Lorenzen

Recently Professor S.R. Goyal issued a call for a new style of political history of ancient India, a history "dedicated not only to the study of political events but also of structures, institutions, environment and power."[1] Other historians such as Romila Thapar have indicated, in somewhat different terms, the need for such a political history that treats politics as the construction and use of structures and institutions of power.[2] Much new-style political history—political history in its broader, structural sense—is in fact being done, both in India and abroad. Names that spring to mind include Champakalakshmi, Devahuti, S.R. Goyal, P.L. Gupta, D.N. Jha, A.K. Narain, R.S. Sharma, Burton Stein, and Romila Thapar.

Even so, it is I think fair to say that many historians of ancient India have not kept up, in terms of the sophistication of either their methodology or themes of research, with recent historians of modern India or with recent historians of ancient Europe and the Middle East. In this essay I will argue that the reasons for this failure by many historians of ancient India to move ahead onto new and more fruitful terrain stems not just from a failure to keep up with new trends in historical research, as Professor Goyal has emphasized, but also from the continuing influence of pro- and anti-imperialist ideology and from a related failure to adequately conceptualize the structure of the state in different epochs of the ancient period.

Up until about 1960, the vast majority of historians who wrote about ancient India, not to mention later periods, were divided into two basic camps: those historians who shared a bias in favor of British imperialism and those who opposed it.[3] The pro-imperialists included orientalists, utilitarians, and evangelicals as well as direct imperialists. Opposing them were the nationalists—conservatives, liberals and Marxists—a few of whom also shared latent Hindu communalist sentiments. From the mid-nineteenth century on, both orientalist and the nationalist historians generally worked within an institutional, academic environment.

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[1] Goyal, S.R., 'Need of a New Approach to the Writing of Political History of Ancient India', in *Political History in a Changing World* (*PHCW*) edited by G.C. Pande, S.K. Gupta and Shankar Goyal that has been published by Kusumanjali Publishing House, Jodhpur. See also several earlier works by S.R. Goyal including those mentioned in note 18 below. The present essay is a slightly revised version of the one I wrote for *PHCW*.

[2] Thapar, R., *From Lineage to State* (Bombay, Oxford University Press, 1984); 'Communalism and the Writing of Ancient Indian History,' in R. Thapar, H. Mukhia and B. Chandra, *Communalism and the Writing of Indian History* (4th printing, New Delhi, People's Publishing House, 1984) and other works.

For somewhat different reasons, this environment required that, for the most part, both pro-imperialist and anti-imperialist historians write their histories using the language of objective, factual scholarship with a minimum of open theorizing. When we re-read many of the better known historical works written before about 1960, however, their pro-imperialist and anti-imperialist biases are often embarrassingly obvious. What is not always so obvious is the extent to which histories written since 1960 share these same biases, either directly or in somewhat altered form. The influence of these pro- and anti-imperialist paradigms inevitably continues to make itself felt, basically in the form of the limits within which discussion operates, even in works that consciously try to move onto new ground.

In the discussion which follows I want to examine some of the typical manifestations of anti-imperialist, nationalist, and occasionally communalist bias in academic histories of the Gupta period written both before and after 1960. The aim will be to show how these manifestations pose significant, though by no means insurmountable, obstacles to the writing of the more sophisticated style of political history that Professor Goyal has called for.

Here my aim is simply to present a critique or deconstruction—a *vitaṇḍa* in Sanskrit terminology—of several historians' statements that appear to me to be either logically inconsistent or obviously influenced by ideological bias rather than lay out any specific research agenda of my own. The purpose is not to criticize these historians as individuals, but rather to point out some problems commonly found in works on ancient Indian history. The two principal topics to be examined in this context are, first, the idea of the Gupta period as a Golden Age and, second, the varied evaluations of the essential character of the Gupta state.

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[3] Lorenzen, David N., 'Imperialism and the Historiography of Ancient India,' in S.N. Mukherjee (ed.), *India: History and Thought* (Calcutta, Subarnarekha, 1982), pp.84-102.

Since the history of the Gupta dynasty was first reconstructed in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Gutpa Age has become a potent symbol of former grandeur for Indian nationalist historians. They have regarded this period as the Golden Age which demonstrates and anticipates the nation's potential for future unity and glory.

Somewhat surprisingly, pro-imperialist historians have made much the same evaluation, perhaps because they recognized that the idea of a Golden Age situated in the distant past is a double-edged symbol, one that can serve imperialist as well as anti-imperialist points of view.[4] The contrast between the Golden Age of the distant past and the degenerate Iron Age of modern India is used to imply the existence of some basic flaw in the Indian national character which led to the fall from former glory. Since many orientalist and imperialist historians were trained in the classics, this further predisposed them to look to the Greek and Roman models of a tragic fall from ancient greatness. Whatever its origin, this wide consensus in favor of a Gupta Golden Age even today exercises a major ideological influence on most academic discussion about Gupta history.

Among serious historical studies of the Gupta period, one of the most transparent nationalist evocations of the Goden Age theme is found in A.S. Altekar's and R.C. Majumdar's study entitled *The Vākāṭaka-Gupta Age*, first published in 1946. Altekar concludes his introduction with the following elogy:[5]

> The above survey of the features and achievements of our age will show that it was undoubtedly a very important epoch of Indian history. It put an end to foreign domination and political disintegration and evolved a mighty state which could protect the country against foreign aggression for a long time. Governments of the age were both efficient and popular and secured peace and prosperity for the people... Different religions and sects lived in peace and harmony, and the standard of average education and culture was higher than in any other period of Indian history. An age charcterised by the above features may well be called the Golden Age of Indian history.

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[4] On this topic, see Inden, R., 'Orientalist Constructions of India,' *Modern Asian Studies*, 20(1986): 401-46; Lorenzen, 'Imperialism and the Historiography of Ancient India'; and Thapar, R., 'Communalism and the Writing of Ancient Indian History'.

[5] Altekar, A.S., and Majumdar, R.C., *The Vākāṭaka-Gupta Age* (2nd ed., Delhi, Motilal Banarasidass, 1960), pp.11-12.

Against this, one can, of course, compare the various imperialist evocations of the whole of ancient India as the domain of the great Oriental Despot, a Western concept that can be traced back to Aristotle and influenced many key nineteenth and twentieth century intellectuals including G.W.F. Hegal, James Mill, K. Marx, F. Engles, Max Weber and K. Wittfogel. The last (and perhaps the only) important general history of ancient India written from what can be called the mature imperialist school of historians is Vincent A. Smith's *The Early History of India,* whose revised fourth edition was first published in 1924. Al- though Smith never explicitly integrated his imperialist bias in a coherent theory, the following remarks scattered through his chapter on the Guptas give a reasonably clear idea of his basic assumptions:[6]

> In the fourth century light again dawns, the veil of oblivion is lifted, and the history of India regains unity and interest....
>
> From the moment of his accession, Samudragupta assumed the part of an aggressively ambitious monarch, resolved to increase his dominions at the expense of his neighbours. Wars of aggression never have been condemned by such public opinion as exists in the East, and no king who cared for his reputation could venture to rest contented within his own borders. Samudragupta has no hesitation in acting on the principle that "kingdom-taking" is the business of kings,...
>
> It is clear that [Samudragupta] was in fact a man of genius who may fairly claim the title of the Indian Napoleon...
>
> The Asoka pillar on which Samudragupta recorded the history of his reign is supposed to have been erected originally at the celebrated city of Kausāmbī, which...was no doubt honoured at times by the residence of the monarch. The real capital of an Oriental despotism is the seat of the despot's court for the time being.

Oriental Despotism, even in its more sophisticated Asiatic Mode of Production variant, has been unanimously rejected by recent historians of ancient India. Nonetheless, its theoretical counterpart from a nationalist perspective, the Golden Age, is a concept that many reputable historians continue to apply to Gupta period: some rather surreptitiously, some quite openly. Consider, for example, A.K. Narain's recent evaluation of the period:[7]

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[6] Smith, Vincent A., *The Early History of India* (4th ed., revised by S.M. Edwardes, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1962) (this edition first published in 1924), pp.295, 297-98, 306, 310.

> During most of this span of time, the Guptas ruled over one of the three largest empires of ancient India... The peace and security, the material prosperity, the intellectual excellence, the moral stability, and the artistic splendour of the Gupta Age can be favorably compared with the best ages of the world history. The impact of the age was felt even outside the limits of the Gupta empire in South and Southeast Asia and lasted longer than their own rule. It is generally recognized that one of the most remarkable features of this age, which is known as the "golden age" or "classical age" of South Asian history, is the religious liberty and harmony which marked the classical expression of Indian culture as a whole.

Even when recent historians have consciously sought to overthrow this Golden Age model, the model in fact often continues to define the limits and terms of the argument. D.N. Jha, for example, attempts to stand the Golden Age on its head in his general evaluation of the Gupta Age, entitled "The Myth of the Golden Age."[8] This text represents a consciously polemical, but well-reasoned challenge from the left to the many historians who continue to regard the period as some sort of Golden Age, if not politically then at least culturally. Jha's choicest barbs are in fact leveled against the social and religious institutions of the age, institutions that most anti-imperialist historians—including many of his leftist colleagues— have been slow to criticize. Jha attacks the prevalence of several forms of female prostitution, including temple prostitution; the general decline in the status of women; the approval of *satī* by several jurists; the proliferation of castes; the increasing degradation of the Untouchables; the discrimination of the social order against the Śūdras; the use of religion to legitimize the social inequities inherent in the *varṇāśrama-dharma* system; and the fact that popular Vaishṇavism—however much it "fulfilled the needs of all sections of society"—also "substituted faith for logic." Jha further stresses that the ornate Sanskrit literature patronized by the royal court could by no means be understood by the "uneducated masses" and reached its highest expression in theatrical works in which "the leading male characters of high social status...speak polished Sanskrit and those of low status and all women speak Prakrit." In his final peroration Jha asserts that "for the upper classes all periods in history have been golden; for the masses none. The truly golden age of the people does not lie in the past, but in the future."

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[7] Narain, A.K., 'Religious Policy and Toleration in Ancient India with Particular Reference to the Gupta Age,' in Bardwell L. Smith (ed.), *Essays on Gupta Culture* (Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1983), pp.17-51 (*n.b.* p.19).

[8] Jha, D.N., *Ancient India: An Introductory Outline* (New Delhi, People's Publishing House, 1977), pp.96-116.

Leaving aside some of the obvious anachronisms inherent in Jha's polemic—after all one cannot fairly judge the ancient world by the standards of a future socialist utopia—his basic point is nonetheless sound: the principal benefits of Gupta rule and Gupta culture went to a small minority of the population, while many of the more exploitative features of the medieval Indian economic and social systems had their roots in the Gupta age. Real progress in the conceptualization of the period, however, obviously requires that both the Golden Age model and its mirror-image Iron Age model be abandoned and replaced with a more complex and less moralistic analysis.

A second and related point where ideological distortion often enters histories of the Gutpa period is in the varied evaluations of the essential character of the Gupta state. In the context of early medieval South India, Burton Stein has noted that each of the authors of the standard works on Chola history "uses evidence anecdotally with the implication that it is statistically valid." Few other examples, Stein claims, can be found to compare with the "inconsistencies, distortions, and ill-founded generalizations such as one finds in medieval South Indian historiography as it deals with the nature of the state.[9] Lamentably, one need look no further than the historical writings about the Gupta state to find similar or worse confusions.

Modern evaluations of the Gupta state most often flounder on the question of the extent do which it was centralized or decentralized. A few examples will suffice to get some idea of the problem. Although the following discussion does not attempt to present my own view of the nature of the Gupta state, I should at least note that I regard this state as having a more decentralized structure than many historians have claimed.

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[9] Stein, B., 'The State and the Agrarian Ordr in Medieval South India: A Historiographical Critique,' in B. Stein (ed.), *Essays on South India* (Honolulu, University Press of Hawaii, 1975), pp.64-90 (*n.b.* pp.67-68).

Lurking behind most of the discussions of this problem is a double ideological inheritance: one part from the ancient ideals of the *chakravartin* and the *digvijayin* and one part from the modern ideal of the centralized national (and often imperialist) state. Both parts of this inheritance have predisposed virtually all historians—pro-imperialists and anti-imperialists alike—to regard a centralized, unitary state as a positive ideal against which to judge, implicitly or explicitly, both the "worth" and "stability" of any given historical period. A period in which there exists a centralized, unified state is good and stable, while one in which there are only small regional states is bad and chaotic. With this we are back to the same old Golden Age versus Iron Age argument. A further complication is that while "stability" is regarded as good, "stagnation"—especially such as is implied by the Oriental Despotism and Asiatic Mode of Production models—is regarded as bad. On the other hand, some scholars have regarded the evidence of decentralized political authority, normally considered as bad, as a consciously pursued policy of limited democratization, which is good. The effects of such misplaced moral evaluations are often implicitly present in the writings of even the best of recent historians.

Romila Thapar has not written about the Gupta period in detail, but she has published two fine short discussions of it: one in A.L. Basham's *Cultural History of India* and another in her own *A History of India.*[10] Like various other historians, however, she cannot quite decide whether the Gupta state was centralized or decentralized and attempts to have it both ways:[11]

> Superficially Gupta administration was similar to that of the Mauryas. The king was the highest authority and the kingdom was divided into a hierarchy of administrative units—provinces, districts, and groups of villages—each with its own range of officers responsible to the most senior officer in the unit. Yet there was a significant difference between Gupta and Mauryan administration: during the Gupta period there was far greater stress on local administration and far less direct control from the centre. Even in urban administration, the City Boards consisted of representatives of local opinion and interest (such as the heads

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[10] Thapar, Romila, 'Aśokan India and the Gupta Age,' in A.L. Basham (ed.), *Cultural History of India* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp.38-50; *A History of India,* Vol.1 (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1966), pp.136-66.

[11] Thapar, 'Aśokan India and the Gupta Age'.

of guilds and artisan and merchant bodies) rather than officers of state.

P.L. Gupta belongs to the conservative nationalist school of Indian history associated with R.C. Majumdar and the contributors to the multivolume Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan *History and Culture of the Indian People.* The historians of this school have often, and justifiably, been criticized for their failure to critically analyze the ideological bases of their sources and for occasionally injecting their own pro-Hindu communal bias. Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged that P.L. Gupta has written not only one of the most careful reconstructions available of the "facts" of Gupta history, but has also judiciously analyzed the character of the Gupta state and administration.[12] Unlike some recent historians, Gupta is generally willing to accept the limitations of the historical evidence about the period and to refrain from imprudent extrapolations from insufficient data.

Even P.L. Gupta's generally sound evaluation of the Gupta state, however, merits some criticism. For instance, while he quite plausibly describes the typical ancient Indian empire as "simply a loose confederation of states" and argues that such empires were inherently unstable, their unity depending on the armed might of the emperor, he then inexplicably changes course and claims that this politcal unity was achieved *voluntarily* when the many independent states of ancient India were threatened with "foreign invasion":[13]

> It was only when the country had to face the serious danger of foreign invasions, people thought of their lasting security and purposeful unity amongst the states under a mighty emperor. India saw the first real great empire, only when the country had the Greek invaders at its door.... The need of an imperial unity was felt again in the Gangetic plains only after half a millenium of this first great experiment. This time the mighty Guptas humbled the pride of the "Son of Heaven" the Kushāṇas and braved the wrath of the Śaka king in his own city.

Here one cannot but suspect some communalist as well as nationalist bias behind Gupta's arguments. It seems reasonable to assume that these "foreign" Greek and Kushāṇa invaders are to some extent projections into the past of the Muslims and British of later centuries. The claim that the Muslim dynasties of medieval India were "foreign" is, in fact, highly tendentious. It has often been used to imply that these dynasties—and by further extension, the contemporary followers of Islam—are not truly loyal to India. Not only is this implied claim mistaken, but the very concept of "foreign," as will be argued below, is not properly applicable to pre-colonial India.

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[12] Gupta, Parmeshwari Lal, *The Imperial Guptas*, 2 Vols. Varanasi, Vishwavidyalaya Prakashan, 1974-79.

[13] *Ibid.*, Vol.2, pp.6-7.

If, moreover, the Gupta empire was a "voluntary union or loose confederation of states" in which "every subordinate state...enjoyed its full autonomy"—as P.L. Gupta goes on to assert—then why did Samudra Gupta have to spend so much of his time and energy fighting and conquering his "voluntary" partners?[14]

The use of the word "foreign" in the above passage merits special comment since it is a commonplace of almost all writing on ancient India, not to mention of writing on medieval and modern India. Ancient Sanskrit does, of course, have words that refer to culturally distinct people belonging to lands outside of the Indian subcontinent, most notably *mlechchha* and *yavana*. The idea of "foreign invasions," however, implies the existence of something quite different, namely the distinctly modern concepts of nationality and states based on some form of popular sovereignty. In other words, the general concept of "foreigner," as opposed to specific groups of outsiders, presupposes the existence of the general concepts of the "citizen" and the "nation-state" to which he belongs. One need not revert to an imperialist ideology that aims to surreptitiously deny the existence of a modern Indian nation in order to argue that the projection of the modern idea of "foreign invasions" onto ancient India is inappropriate.

Another lapse in P.L. Gupta's generally solid portrayal of the Gupta state is his over-optimistic evaluation of the representative character of the administrative board associated with the district officer known as the *vishayapati* in the Damodarpur copper-plate inscriptions. This board consisted of the functionaries known as the *nagara-śreshaṭhin*, the *sārthavāha*, the *prathama-kulika*, and the *prathama-kāyastha*, who were presumably the heads of corporate groups of businessmen, traders, artisans or agriculturalists, and scribes respectively. Gupta describes this board as "the representative body of all classes of people of the *viṣaya*."[15] One wonders which board member was the repesentative of the Chaṇḍālas who the Gupta-age Chinese pilgrim

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[14] *Ibid.*, p.9.

[15] *Ibid.*, p.31.

Faxian (Fa-Hsien) describes as going about striking pieces of wood "so that men know and avoid them, and do not come into contact with them."[16]

D.N. Jha's Iron Age vision of the Gupta Age inevitably colors his discussion of the Gupta state, leading him to emphasize its "failure" to centralize political authority. Nonetheless, this view has the considerable virtue of being compatible with significant historical data:

> The disintegration of the Gupta power cannot be fully explained by the Hun invasion. Perhaps it was the inevitable result of the manner in which the empire was organised. Unlike the Mauryas, the Guptas adopted such pompous titles as *parameshvara, maharajadhiraja, paramabhattaraka,* etc. which imply the existence of lesser kings with considerable authority within the empire.... As soon as the opportunity presented itself, they asserted their independence reducing the empire to a mere shadow.

Despite the superficial similarities to P.L. Gupta's "loose confederation of states," the intention here is obviosuly very different. Jha goes on to cite the increasingly hereditary character of the administration, the decentralization of administrative authority due to land grants "with fiscal and administrative immunities to priests and temples," the "depression of the peasantry...caused by the right of subinfeudation granted to the recipients of land grants," "the imposition of forced labour (*vishti*)," the "commerical decline... indicated by the paucity of coins of common use," and "the decline of urban centres at least in the Gangetic plains."[17]

S.R. Goyal, together with the late Devahuti, represents the best of a new group of conservative historians who have reformulated nationalist historiography to make it relevant to post-independence, post-1962 realities in the subcontinent. Goyal's discussion of the Gupta age in his recent *Gupta Sāmrājya kā Ititihās* (1987)—taken together with his other works on this period—may be profitably contrasted with D.N. Jha's treatment of the same period.[18] All historians necessarily read and interpret the past in the light of the experience of their own times, but some historians do this in a more explicit way than others. I read both S.R. Goyal and D.N. Jha as expressing quite direct commentaries on contemporary India through implicit comparisons between it and the conditions of the Gupta age.

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[16] Faxian (Fa-Hsien), *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms*, trans. by James Legge (reprint, New York, Dover, 1965), p.43.

[17] Jha, D.N., *Ancient India*, pp.96-116.

[18] Goyal, S.R., *Gupta Sāmrājya kā Itihāsa* (Meerut, Kusumanjali Prakashan, 1987); *Guptakālīna Abhilekha* (Meerut, Kusumanjali Prakashan, 1984); *A History of the Imperial Guptas* (Allahabad, Central Book Depot, 1967). See also Goyal's extensive contributions to M.C. Joshi, S.K. Gupta and Shankar Goyal (eds.), *King Chandra and the Meharauli Pillar* (Meerut, Kusumanjali Prakashan, 1989) as well as his many other articles and histories on the ancient period.

Like A.K. Narain and P.L. Gupta, S.R. Goyal tends to accept the evaluation of the Gupta age as a golden age, but he adds two major qualifications that overturn any simple emphasis on the role of "foreign" invasions in the breakup of the empire. Indeed, Goyal's major theoretical contribution is to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the fall of the empire. Goyal seeks to balance the role of external invasions with internal, endogenous factors. He identifies the feudal-like political decentralization of the empire and the pacifist ideology of Buddhism as two major internal factors that combined with the impact of the new Hūṇa incursion of Toramāṇa to hasten the demise of the empire toward the end of the fifth century.

Goyal's concern with what he sees as the noxious effects of Buddhism is shared by few other historians.[19] Consider the following passage from *Gupta Sāmrājya kā Itihāsa* (pp.382-83):

> But in the time of Kumāra Gupta I, the shadow of the Buddhist religion began to fall on the Gupta dynasty. As a result, the Gupta kings became preoccupied with the acquisition of merit instead of with the dream of conquering the earth...
>
> As a consequence of the influence of the Buddhist religion, the Gupta kings' love of battle, which was necessary for the defense of the empire, virtually vanished. We have seen that in the sixth century A.D., because of internal disputes and the Hūṇa incursions, the situation of the Gupta lineage became extremely unsteady. At such a time, reform of the system of empire and of military organization, as well as the firm control of external and internal enemies, were the biggest necessities. But, sunk to the neck in the influence of the Buddhist religion, Narasiṁha Gupta II kept filling his kingdom with *chaityas* and *vihāras*. When Mihirakula attacked, Narasiṁha promptly fled to save his own "worthless body." Even afterwards, when the Hūṇa king had been caught by dependent kings, Narasiṁha demonstrated a

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[19] This objection to the pacifist ideology of Buddhism is also reflected in Goyal's *Harsha and Buddhism* (Meerut, Kusumanjali Prakashan, 1986). The main aim of this monograph is to prove that Harsha was *not* a Buddhist.

> terrible lack of foresight when, on the advice of his own mother, he came and released this dangerous enemy for the sake of acquiring merit. What better measure of the harmful influence of Buddhist religion than this?

In using such arguments, it seems to me fair to assume that Goyal is drawing an implicit moral lesson for contemporary India. His *bête noir* is not Buddhism itself, nor is he primarily making a plea for Hindu unity against other religions; rather he is directing his criticism against the pacifist propensities of Buddhism. In this is he not implicitly thinking back to the reputedly disastrous effects of Aśoka's Buddhist pacifism and ahead to the political controversies over the appropriate level of military preparedness against perceived threats from China and Pakistan?

To me this emphasis on the pacifist influence of Buddhist ideology seems to be overdrawn. With the remarkable exception of Aśoka, we have virtually no direct evidence that the profession of Buddhism, or Jainism for that matter, led ancient Indian kings to seriously neglect military activity or soften criminal justice. Even Aśoka's pacifism, as R. Thapar and others have argued, may have involved more propaganda than substance.

One aspect of Goyal's argument against Buddhism, however, is clearly more substantial. This concerns the role of the financial drain represented by permanent donation of tax revenues to Buddhist monasteries, Nālandā being simply the biggest and most famous of hundreds of these institutions. This argument is, as Goyal acknowledges, a key element in R.S. Sharma's theory of the "feudalization" of the early medieval period. Goyal's firm location of the beginnings of this process in the early Gupta age is convincing, but to insist on the preponderant role of Buddhist institutions in this process, as Goyal tends to do, seems less justified. Judging from the admittedly limited evidence of Gupta inscriptions, Hindu temples, Brāhmaṇa *agrahāras* and *brahmadeya* villages may have represented an equal or even greater diversion of tax revenues.

Another aspect of the feudalization thesis is the role of political ideology and administrative practice. Goyal notes that the *chakravartin* and *digvijaya* ideals permitted, and even encouraged, the Gupta kings to restore conquered minor kings on their former thrones. This legitimized an administrative system in which the central emperor in fact was content to exercise only nominal control over most of his empire.

Goyal attributes the establishment of this system to Samudra Gupta himself and claims that it was "the chief cause of the Gupta empire's decline and fall."[20] If the emperor faltered, the subordinate kings would not and did not hesitate to claim independent sovereignty.

The possibility that Professor Goyal and other historians perhaps do not adequtely consider is that such a decentralized system of government may have been the best financially viable alternative for the ecological balance of Gupta times, and, by extension, that the very existence of a large empire such as that of the Guptas' was an unstable aberration in the relatively stable system of smaller, often warring, regional states prevalent during most of the ancient period.

It is difficult not to again suspect that here Goyal—together with such unlikely allies as R.S. Sharma and D.N. Jha—has contemporary Indian conditions implicitly in mind. After all, the great political debate between those who favor a strong central government authority and those who prefer a looser federal structure has dominated much of Indian politics in the post-Independence period. It is also somewhat ironic that some strongly nationalist historians of late medieval and modern India—otherwise generally advocates of a strong central government—have argued for the existence of a stable system of regional states in the eighteenth century in order to counter the claims of imperialist historians that the British were simply moving in to fill the chaotic vacuum left by the collapse of the central Mughal authority. It is necessary to bear in mind in all this, however, that the economic and political conditions created by modern industrialization and popular sovereignty are radically different than those of the ancient period. Much that was true then is unlikely to be true today.

A.K. Narain, Romila Thapar, P.L. Gupta, D.N. Jha, and S.R. Goyal, for all their important differences, are some of the best recent historians of ancient India. When one turns to lesser lights such as Arun Bhattacharjee, the evaluation of the Gupta state can sometimes fall into comic absurdity. Consider the following:[21]

> The imperial perfection was achieved in the hands of the Guptas and their administration was better than that of the Mauryas. The Gupta administration was more perfect than the British in as much as the British rule was from without while the Gupta

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[20] See *Gupta Sāmrājya kā Itihās* p.374.

[21] Bhattarcharjee, Arun, *History of Ancient India* (New Delhi, Sterling Publishers, 1982 [1979], pp.275-79.

> administration was from within.... The Gupta empire was more extensive than the Maurya empire and it was therefore more imposing and bureaucratic...
>
> We have no doubt that it was a welfare state and the Guptas strove to bring out the all-round development of the citizens. More important, although the king appeared to be absolute, he was never autocratic...
>
> The notable feature of the Gupta administration was the democratic form of government forming an integral part of the imperial administration... The Gupta administration represents a remarkable blend of the best ideals of monarchy, democracy and federation in their harmonious and co-operative working.

What can one say to all this? A more "remarkable blend" is truly hard to imagine.

Unless historians of ancient India can break the continuing ideological influence of the Golden Age and Iron Age models and better conceptualize the nature of the Gupta state, no significant advance can be made in the ways in which the political history of the Gupta period and other epochs of ancient Indian history are discussed. Political history—like economic, religious and social history—must be treated as a struggle for dominance among competing individual and institutional interests, not as a record of the victories and defeats of either magnificent emperors or nefarious despots. Some kings and some epochs have undoubtedly been better than others, but it should be obvious that the principal task of academic historians is to understand the past, not to pass moral judgements on it. Historians of ancient India must learn to refrain from making elaborate and ultimately silly extrapolations from inadequate data, at the same time that they attempt to put the data that is available into more worthwhile and complex conceptual frameworks.

5

A Critique of Professor D.N. Jha's Evaluation of the Classicism of the Gupta Age

Shankar Goyal

D.N. Jha is an eminent historian interested in and inspired by Marxism and has several books and research papers to his credit. A highly knowledgeable and intelligent scholar, Jha is interested in with that interpretation of Indian history which was initiated by B.N. Datta,[1] S.A. Dange[2] and D.D. Kosambi[3] and has been followed *mutatis mutandis* by many historians such as R.S. Sharma,[4] Romila Thapar,[5] Suvira Jaiswal[6] and Vijay Kumar Thakur[7] who have been explaining and analysing the evolution of Indian history with reference to the changes in the means and relations of production, so much so that some of them even look upon the *Gītā* as a manual of feudal ideology.[8] In recent years many of them have criticised the concept of the Gupta age as the classical or golden age of India, a concept usually unhesitatingly accepted by traditional historians. For example, V.K. Thakur[9] and R.S. Sharma[10] have postulated the theory of urban decay in the Gupta age. Romila Thapar has restricted the classicism of the Gupta period to northern India alone. She has opined:

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[1] *Studies in Indian Social Polity*, Culcutta, 1944; *Dialectics of Land Economics in India*, Culcutta, 1952. Taking a long view of the socio-economic developments throughout the ancient period, Dutta spoke at length of the class struggle and growth of feudalism in ancient India.

[2] Dange sought to prove the emergence of slave society in the later Vedic period. Vide his *India from Primitive Communism to Slavery*, first edn., Delhi, 1949. For a critical evaluation of the book see Kosambi, D.D., 'Marxism and Ancient Indian Culture', *ABORI*, XXIX, 1949, pp.271-77.

[3] The writings of Kosambi generally give an idea of his perception of the changes in early Indian society. Cf. his 'Early Stages of the Caste System in Northern India', *JBBRAS*, XXII, 1946, pp.33-48; 'Ancient Kosala and Magadha', *ibid.*, XXVII, 1951, pp.180-213; 'The Basis of Ancient Indian History', *JAOS*, LXXXV, 1955, pp.35-45, 226-37; *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, Second revised edn., Bombay, 1975; *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, seventh edn., New Delhi, 1982.

[4] Cf. Sharma, R.S. 'Historiography of the Ancient Indian Social Order', in *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, ed. C.H. Philips, London, 1961, pp. 102-14; *Perspectives in Social and Economic History of Early India*, New Delhi, 1983, Chs. 9 and 10; *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India*, New Delhi, 1983, Ch.1.

[5] Romila Thapar's articles focussing on social changes in early India have been compiled in *Ancient Indian Social History*, Delhi, 1978; also see her *A History of India*, I, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1966.

[6] Jaiswal, Suvira, *The Origin and Development of Vaiṣṇavism*, Delhi, 1967.

[7] Cf. Thakur, V.K., *Urbanisation in Ancient India*, New Delhi, 1981; *Historiography of Indian Feudalism:Towards a Model of Early Medieval Indian Economy, c. A.D.600-1000*, Patna, 1989.

> For historians writing in the early twentieth century, the 'golden age' had to be a utopia set in the distant past, and the period chosen by those working on the early history of India was one in which Hindu culture came to be firmly established. However, the classicism of the Gupta period was restricted to northern India alone, since in the Deccan and South India it was the post-Gupta period that saw the evolution of a high level of civilization.[11]

D.N. Jha, whose views are being particularly analysed in this paper, has expressed doubts in the correctness of the popular notion that the Gupta period was the golden or classical age of ancient Indian history quite explicitly.[12] In his general evaluation of the Gupta period he argues that the Gupta age cannot be called the golden age of Indian history especially because, in his opinion, the prosperity and the cultural progress of the period did not reach most sections of society and many parts of the country. He argues that the eulogy of the Gupta rulers is found only in their epigraphs, especially in the Prayāga *Praśasti* of Samudragupta. He points out that in the nineteenth century, when Prinsep and some other epigraphists and historians studied these epigraphs, nationalist historians deliberately made use of them to prove that the Gupta period was the golden age of Indian history. He states:

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[8] Kosambi, D.D., *Myth and Reality*, Bombay, 1962, p.12 f.; Thakur, V.K., *Historiography of Indian Feudalism*, pp.110-11. Also see D.N. Jha's article on D.D. Kosambi in *Historians and Historiography in Modern India*, ed. S.P. Sen, Calcutta, 1973, p.129.

[9] For details, vide *Urbanisation in Ancient India*, pp.261-91.

[10] Sharma, R.S., 'Decay of Gangetic Towns in Gupta Times', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 33rd Session, Muzaffarpur, 1972, pp.92-104; also see his *Urban Decay in India (c.300-1000)*, New Delhi, 1987.

It is beyond the scope of the present paper to discuss Sharma's writings on urban decay. However, here it may be remarked that in ancient period new towns and their buildings were constructed with the help of the debris of the older materials. Therefore, it will be hazardous to postulate a decline of urban centres on the basis of archaeological evidence alone. Further, the literary data throws ample light on the urban centres of the Gupta age. And, lastly, the existence of urban centres in early medieval period is not in consonance with the theory of urban decay in the Gupta age. Vide, Thakur, V.K., 'Urban Centres in Early Medieval Bengal: An Archaeological Perspective', a paper submitted to the Seminar on Socio-Economic Formation in the Early Middle Ages of Indian History, organised by the Department of Ancient History, Culture and Archaeology, University of Allahabad, Allahabad, December, 1980.

[11] Thaper, Romila, *A History of India*, I, p.136.

[12] Jha, D.N., *Ancient India—An Introductory Outline*, New Delhi, 1977, pp.96-116.

> The Gupta emperors, with the exception of the 'ignoble' Ramagupta, are also credited with a revival of nationalism, presumably because they fought against the Shakas and the Huns. No extant court drama or Sanskrit poetical work directly refers to any Gupta ruler. The only contemporary reference to them is found in the *Puranas,* which contemptously group them with many petty kings described as "barbarous (*mlechchhapraya*), impious, dishonest (or liars), niggardly and highly irascible." The praise showered on the Guptas is found in their own inscriptions, Samudragupta's eulogy being the longest. Soon after their fall they joined the legion of the forgotten, and their memory was not revived until the nineteenth century when their records were deciphered. The documents were seized upon by the nationalist Indian scholars, who used them justifiably as counter-argument to the persistent British imperialist propaganda: "India has no history, except conquest by a continuous succession of foreign invaders."[13]

Jha approvingly quotes Kosambi to support his view:

> It has been rightly remarked that "far from the Guptas reviving nationalism, it was nationalism that revived the Guptas."[14]

Jha also raises objections on the question of accepting Gupta culture as 'Hindu'. He argues:

> The period of the imperial Guptas is described in most standard works on Indian history as one of Hindu renaissance. This is far from true. The highest achievements of the Gupta sculpture are the Buddhist images from Sarnath; the best contemporary paintings from Ajanta have Buddhist themes. Progress in astronomical knowledge as represented in the writings of Aryabhata and Varahamihira owed, only in part, to indigenous tradition. One of

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[13] *Ibid.*, p.115.

[14] *Ibid.*

> the five astronomical system dealt with by Varahamihira was the *Romakasiddhanta*, which evidently referred to the Roman system; another the *Paulishasiddhanta* is explained as a recollection of the name of the classical astronomer Paul of Alexandria. The main evidence for the so-called Hindu renaissance therefore lies in the writings of Kalidasa, the composition of some of the *Puranas*, and in the coins and inscriptions which indicate that the Gupta kings patronised the two brahmanical sects, Vaishnavism and Shaivism. But the works of Kalidasa are not indicative of an intellectual rebirth or revival of literary activity; they merely imply a further development of the literary forms and styles which were evolving in the earlier period. The *Puranas* had existed much before the time of the Guptas in the form of bardic literature; in the Gupta age they were finally compiled and given their present form. Nor does the growing popularity of Vaishnavism and Shaivism mean any religious resurgence. The basic tenets of the two religions go back to earlier times; now in the context of emerging feudal conditions they could attract a greater following. The use of the term Hindu is equally erroneous.[15]

Jha's choicest barbs are levelled against the social and religious institutions of the age. He argues that it was a period of decentralisation and was characterised by a decline of urban centres, increase in the variety of taxes, emergence of new castes of which some were administrative functionaries and a more evident presence of untouchables,[16] It will be worthwhile to cite Jha at some length on this point. According to him in the Gupta period "in certain parts of the country the position of independent peasants was undermined, and they were reduced to serfs or semiserfs."[17] "The practice of subinfeudation therefore reduced the permanent tenants to the position of tenants-at-will."[18] The position of peasants was also undermined from the Gupta period onwards on account of the imposition of forced labour (*vishti*) and several new levies and taxes."[19] "Languishing trade explains the decline of urban centres at least in the Gangetic plains, which formed the heartland of the Gupta empire."[20] "The status of women continued to decline...They themselves came to be regarded as property which could be given or loaned to anybody."[21] "The practice of *sati* (self-immolation at the funeral pyre of the husband) gained approval of the jurists."[22] "Pronounced varna distinctions in various spheres of life can be seen in the writings of the Gupta period...A Puranic text compiled in Gupta times associated the four colours, white, red, yellow and black, with brahmana, kshatriya, vaishya and shudra respectively. This shows the relative status of the four orders. The writings of the period emphasise that a brahmana should not accept food from a shudra because it reduces his spritual strength... All this proves the class bias of law and justice."[23] "The practice of untouchability became more intense than in the earlier period."[24] "The best poets and playwrights often found their richest pasture in man's passionate physical love for woman."[25] "The uneducated masses could have hardly understood and much less appreciated the ornate court literature. Not surprisingly therefore the leading male characters of high social status in the contemporary plays speak polished Sanskrit, and those of low status and all women speak Prakrit."[26] "Some Indian historians have been so enamoured of the Guptas as to tirelessly speak of their rule as representing a golden age in Indian history. In an emotionally surcharged multi-volume work we are told in a vein of romantic lamentation: 'Life was never happier'. Yet it was during the period of the Guptas that in certain parts of the country serfdom appered leading eventually to the economic bondage of the peasantry. Women became an item of property and came to live in the perpetual tutelage of man, notwithstanding their idealisation in art and literature. Caste distinctions and caste rigidity became sharper than ever before; law and justice showed a definite bias in favour of the higher castes. Fa-hsien, the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim-scholar who came to India during the reign of Chandragupta II, tells us that the people were generally happy. True, the upper classes were happy and prosperous, and lived in comfort and ease, as can be judged from the contemporary art and literature. But this could have been hardly true of the lower orders;... Social tensions continued. But religion was used as an instrument for maintaining the varna divided society. For the upper classes all periods in history have been golden; for the masses none. The truly golden age of the people does not lie in the past, but in the future."[27]

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[15] *Ibid.*, pp.114-15.

[16] Jha also argues that many of these changes were due to the emerging feudal structure. However, according to some, emergenece of serfdom, slavery and feudalism took place much earlier, in the Maurya period

[17] *Op.cit.*, p.101.

[18] *Ibid.*

[19] *Ibid.*

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[20] *Ibid.*, p.101.

[21] *Ibid.*, p.103.

[22] *Ibid.*, pp.103-04.

[23] *Ibid.*, pp.104-05.

[24] *Ibid.*, p.105.

[25] *Ibid.*, p.114.

[26] *Ibid.*

Thus Jha's observations go against the view that the Gupta age was the golden or classical age of India. However, to us it seems that he has not followed a clear concept of the 'classical' or 'golden' age. The term 'classical' is derived from the Latin epithet *Classicus,* found in a passage of Anlus Gellius, where a *Scriptor Classicus* is contrasted with a *Scriptor Proletarions.* The metaphor is taken from the division of Roman people into three classes by Servius Tivellius who calls Roman of the first class *Classici,* of the second *Classem* and the last *Proletarii.* Accordingly the epithet 'Classic' is generally applied to an author of the first rank, and more particularly to a Greek or Roman author of that character. Thus the term 'Classic' is a synonym for the choicest products of the literature of ancient Greece and Rome. The high esteem in which Greek and Latin were held at the revival of letters obtained for these authors the name of 'Classics', and when other first rate works are intended, some distinctive name is added, as the English Classics, Spanish Classics or French Classics. The term 'Classical', therefore, refers to the literary and other production of the first rate order.[28] Romila Thapar also follows such a definition. She clearly opines:

> The conventional definition of a classical age is one where literature, architecture, and the fine arts reach a high level of excellence to form a standard for later times.[29]

In the European context the classical tradition chiefly meant the cultural heritage of Greece and Rome and the Roman concept of Universal Empire and its legacy of law and jurisprudence. This legacy was greatly transformed in the medieval period under the impact of various factors and forces chief of them being the immigration and invasions of the barbarians, growth in the dominance of the Christian Church, feudalism, etc. In India the situation was *mutatis mutandis* the same. Here usually the age of the imperial Guptas is equated with the 'classical age' of India, also called 'golden' because of its great achievements. Its achievements in literature, arts and sciences correspond to the achievements of the Greeks and Romans in these spheres, its concept of the *Chakravartikshetra* is comparable with the concept of the Universal Empire, the title 'Caesar' adopted by the Roman emperors reminds one of the title 'Vikramāditya' usually adopted by the Gupta emperors and subsequent rulers, the growth of the Smṛti Law corresponds to the development of Roman law and jurisprudence, and so on. Even the factors in the decline of classicism in India were similar to those of Europe. However, there is no unanimity about the upper and lower limits of the Indian classical age. Its upper limit is sometimes extended to 750 A.D. and the lower one is so stretched by some as to include the Kushāṇa and sometimes even the Maurya age in it. It is not surprising since in Europe also historians and chroniclers have been using the term 'ancient' as almost synonymous with the age of the Classical or Graeco-Roman civilization. It may, therefore, be reasonably conceded that in India also the age of the Imperial Guptas marked the efflorenscence and culmination of earlier tendencies, many of which go back to the Maurya period and that some of its glory continued for about two centuries after the fall of the Gupta empire. However, the age of the mighty Gupta emperors was the focal point of this long period. It is in this sense that the term 'classical' or 'golden' has been used for the Gupta age by most Indian historians. For example, K.M. Munshi highlights the achievements of the Gupta rulers thus:

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[27] *Ibid.,* pp.115-16.

[28] Maity, S.K., *The Imperial Guptas and Their Times* (*cir. A.D 300-500*), New Delhi, 1975, p.1; David N. Lorenzen also discusses the idea of the Gupta period as a golden age, 'Professor Goyal's Suggestion on Political History Writing in the Light of Historians and Political History of the Gupta Empire', in *Political History in a Changing World,* eds. G.C. Pande, S.K. Gupta and Shankar Goyal, Jodhpur, 1991, pp.44-56. For another unbalanced definition of the golden age, vide Jamindar, R., 'The Concept of the Golden Age and Some General Problems', *Problems of Indian Historiography,* ed. Devahuti, Delhi, 1979, pp.76-77.

[29] Thaper, Romila, *op.cit.,* p.157.

> The four Gupta emperors,—omitting, of course, the ignoble Rāmagupta,—in maintaining the ideals of a *chakravartī*, made the state at one and the same time, powerful, stable, dynamic and happy. The age saw the speculative thought among others of Vasubandhu and the Nāyanmārs; the perfect lyric and drama of Kālidāsa; the astronomical discoveries of Varāhamihira; the iron pillar of Delhi; the beginnings of the structural temples; the beauty of the early Ajanta frescoes; the rise of Vaishṇavism and Śaivism; the completion of the *Mahābhārata* and the composition of *Vāyu* and the *Matsyapurāṇas*. The empire was not merely based on conquests or administrative effeciency; its greatness lay

> in its integral outlook. Its strength was based as much on military strength as on internal order and economic plenty; the sap of its vitality was drawn from the roots of ancient tradition and race memory which they maintained, re-interpreted and replenished. The upsurge of the Kshatriya hierarchs of Madhyadésa and Magadha, loyally pledged to stability, constituted the steel-frame of the imperial structure. Nor was the splendour of the empire an isolated phenomenon surrounding the individuality of the rulers. The people, having discovered in their traditional way of life something noble and splendid, only saw it reflected in the greatness of their rulers. The Vākāṭkas and the Pallavas of the far South, the two other dominant powers in the country closely allied with the Guptas, joined in availing themselves of the agency of the Brāhmaṇas, the missionaries and instruments of *Dharma*, by lavish generosity.[30]

R.C. Majumdar also opines:

> 'All mortal power is doomed to decline, but the memory of greatness stands for ever.' These words, put in the mouth of Pericles by the great historian who witnessed the downfall of Athens, may be taken as a fit epitaph for the Gupta Empire. It rose and fell, but left a deep impress upon posterity by the standard which it set in all departments of life and culture—a standard which was alike the envy and despair of succeeding ages. Its greatness was such that even today, after the lapse of fifteen hundred years, the Gupta Age is regarded as the Golden or Classical Age of India. In letters and science, as well as in arts and crafts, it evoked the highest intellectual expression that India was ever capable of, and the religious movements and philosophical speculations which it fostered are still the greatest living forces in Indian life.[31]

Like K.M. Munshi and R.C. Majumdar, R.N. Dandekar states:

> In the realms of art and literature, in political and economic enterprises, in religious and philosophical speculations, in short, in almost every sphere of life, we get, in this period, the best and the highest of which the Indians were capable. It was an age of

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[30] Cf. K.M. Munshi's 'Foreword' in *The Classical Age*, ed. by R.C. Majumdar, Bombay, 1954, pp.xiv-xv.

[31] Majumdar, R.C. (ed.), *A Comprehensive History of India*, Volume Three, Part I (A.D.300-985), New Delhi, 1981, p.105; also see his 'Preface' in *The Classical Age*.

> unique and most typically Indian achievements in the realms of thought and deed, and amply deserves to be called the Golden Age of Indian History.[32]

Even Romila Thapar is apparently inclined to accept Gupta period as the age when classical norms were evolved:

> The Gupta age is better remembered as the age which saw the triumph of Sanskritic culture in many parts of the subcontinent... This period saw the crystallization of what came to be the classical norm in ancient India on both the political and the cultural levels... Thus, Hinduism revitalized itself and was able to slowly supplant the heterodox religions. The brāhmaṇs, who regarded themselves as the interpreters of Hinduism, were able to rewrite the older texts to conform to their own vision of society, as is evident from Purāṇic literature, and were able to convert popular secular material, such as the two epics, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, into sacred literature.
>
> It was from these cultural roots that the classical norm evolved.[33]

D.N. Jha apparently does not use the term 'golden' or 'classical' age in the generally accepted sense of an age where literature, architecture, and the fine arts reach a high level of excellence to form a standard for later times. He uses it in the sense of 'revival' or 'resurgence' in order to prove that the Gupta age was not the age of 'revival' or 'resurgence'. This is apparent from his observation that "the works of Kālidāsa are not indicative of an intellectual rebirth or revival of literary activity; they merely imply a further development of the literary forms and styles which were evolving in the earlier period. The Puranas had existed much before the time of the Guptas in the form of bardic literature; in the Gupta age they were finally compiled and given their present form. Nor does the growing popularity of Vaishnavism and Shaivism mean any religious resurgence. The basic tenets of the two religions go back to earlier times; now in the context of emerging feudal conditions they could attract a greater following."[34]

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[32] R.N. Dandekar in *op.cit.*, p.279.

[33] Thapar, Romila, 'Aśokan India and the Gupta Age', in A.L. Basham (ed.), *Cultural History of India*, London, 1975, pp.38, 46, 48.

Many other historians of ancient India tend to accept the evaluation of the Gupta age as a golden age. Vide Gupta, P.L., *The Imperial Guptas*, 2 Vols., Varanasi, 1974-79; Narain, A.K., 'Religious Policy and Toleration in Ancient India with Particular Reference to the Gupta Age', in Bardwell L. Smith (ed.), *Essays on Gupta Culture*, Delhi, 1983, pp.17-51.

[34] Jha, D.N., *op.cit.*, pp.114-15.

The main purpose of Jha in propounding the thesis that the Gupta age was not an age of 'revival' or 'resurgence' is obviously to circumvent the logical conclusion which emerges from his own observations that the Gupta culture representes the culmination of earlier tendencies and in several spheres became a standard or norm for the subsequent ages, which is what one means by the term 'classical age'. Jha is quite aware of the fact that in several fields great achievements were made in the Gupta age which became ideal or norm for the subsequent ages. For example, he concedes that "In literature, as in art and architecture, the Gupta period witnessed an efflorescence..."[35]; That "The Guptas issued the largest number of gold coins in ancient India..."[36]; that "Prosperous town dwellers seem to have lived in comfort and ease..."[37]; that "Gatherings were held where poetic recitations, compositions and music were heard..."[38]; that "The courtesan was not looked down upon. She was a normal feature of city life..."[39]; that "Earlier developments in plastic arts seems to have culminated in the Gupta period... The crowning achievement of the Gutpa sculpture is noticeable in the numerous seated and standing images of the Buddha and bodhisattvas from Sarnath..."[40]; that "Painting was a developed art... The Ajanta artists displayed consummate skill in delineating human and animal figures... Decorations in ceilings, pedestals of columns and door and window-frames speak of the artists extraordinary powers of conception and technique..."[41]; that "The Gupta period may be said to be a landmark in the development of philosophical ideas..."[42]; and that "Sanskrit language and literature, after centuries of evolution, through lavish royal patronage reached what has been described as a level of classical excellence."[43] He also quotes Fa-hsien's statement that "the people were generally happy."[44] In view of these facts one should have no hesitation in concluding that the Gupta age was the golden or classical age of ancient India, provided he is ready to follow the generally accepted definition of such an age. *But Jha apparently believes that in golden age all the sections of society throughout the length and breadth of the country should be happy.* That is why he asserts that in the Gupta age, though "the upper classes were happy and prosperous, and lived in comfort and ease, as can be judged from the contemporary art and literature"[45] "this could have been hardly true of the lower orders"[46] and laments that "for the upper classes all periods in history have been golden; for the masses none."[47]

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[35] *Ibid.*, p.112.
[36] *Ibid.*, p.102.
[37] *Ibid.*,·p.103.
[38] *Ibid.*
[39] *Ibid.*
[40] *Ibid.*, p.111.
[41] *Ibid.*, p.112.
[42] *Ibid.*, p.110.
[43] *Ibid.*, p.112.
[44] *Ibid.*, p.115-16.

Jha has also tried to side-track the issue in another way. He raises objection against the use of the term 'Hindu' for Indian culture of the Gupta period for, he argues, "The highest achievements of the Gupta sculpture are the Buddhist images from Sarnath; the best contemporary paintings from Ajanta have Buddhist themes. Progress in astronomical knowledge as represented in the writings of Aryabhata and Varahamihira owed, only in part, to indigenous tradition. One of the five astronomical system dealt with by Varahamihira was the *Romakasiddhanta* which evidently referred to the Roman system; another the *Paulishasiddhanta* is explained as a recollection of the name of the classical astronomer Paul of Alexandria."[48] But if one will be guided by this approach there will remain nothing which one would be able to call 'Indian', what to talk of 'Hindu'. As has been emphasised countless times even by the most orthodox 'Hindu' scholars, Indian culture has been, and is, a composite culture and so was the Hindu culture of ancient period. To differentiate between 'Hindu', 'Jaina' and 'Buddhist' cultures in the ancient period of our country's history is, to say the least, a futile exercise, and against the beliefs and psychology of our ancestors. They never thought in terms of separate Hindu, Buddhist and Jaina cultures; to believe in such an absurdity would be believing that, to quote only one example, Paramādityabhakta Prabhākaravardhana, the Pushyabhūti ruler of Kanauj, and his sons Paramasaugata Rājyavardhana II and Paramamāheśvara Harsha belonged to three different cultures. As regards the contribution of the Greeks and Romans to ancient Indian astronomy, and the acceptance of this contribution as part of Indian astronomical lore, is it a proof of the inherent assimilative strength of Indian culture or a proof of the presumption that the

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[45] *Ibid.*, p.116.

[46] *Ibid.*

[47] *Ibid.*

[48] *Ibid.*, p.114.

Gupta culture was not 'Hindu'? Historians, who give such arguments criticise the Hindus of the Rajput age for not being able to assimilate foreign elements, but in the present case they cite the assimilation of the Greek and Roman astronomical schools in Indian astronomy only to prove that the Gupta culture was not Hindu!

D.N. Jha's views on the Gupta age have been severely criticised by S.R. Goyal,[49] one of the more important of the new group of conservative historians, who are trying to reformulate Indian historiography to make it relevant for the post-1947 period.[50] Goyal is deeply concerned with the growing gross misrepresentation and distortion of Indian history due to the bias and subjective approach of some of our historians during the last three decades. He particularly criticises the Marxist and communal analyses of Indian history.[51] He concedes that a historian cannot be completely free from his own perceptions and ideas and there should be nothing to prevent him from suggesting causes, factors and results of any event which do not find explicit mention in the sources but, he argues, he is expected not to draw conclusions on the basis of pre-conceived notions. This can be achieved only through an objective look at the events and their background.Goyal is, therefore, highly critical of the deliberate misinterpetation of the Gupta age by D.N. Jha and others. Raising his voice against the argument of Jha that the prosperity of the golden age was not evenly distributed, he asks, when did it happen that the fruits of a classical or golden age were enjoyed by all sections of society throughout the length and breadth of a country?[52] It happened neither in Athens, nor in Rome and nor in England. According to Goyal, Jha has viewed the Gupta age with the eyes of a 'sanitary inspector',[53] for while evaluating it as a golden age he looks upon only those aspects which appear to him defective. India is a country of caste system with its drawbacks quite well-known. But is it fair to ignore the great achievements of our ancestors of a particular period on this plea? Does it mean that no period of India history may be called 'golden' or 'classical', because the caste system existed in India of the Vedic age and exists even now? Goyal agrees that the literature of the Gupta age does not contain the eulogies of the Gupta emperors. But does it not mean, he argues, that they were not given that importance in Indian society which was given to Alexanders and Caesars in Europe? Does it not prove that the contemporary literature was not 'royal' in inspiration? Does it not make Indian classical age more glorious and relevant for our times? If Jha criticises the inscriptions of the Guptas for being eulogies of these rulers, then he should admire the Gupta literature for not giving such an importance to them. But he criticises the epigraphic eulogies of the Guptas for being 'royal' or 'official' in nature, and at the same time argues that the Gupta rulers were not much important, for they are not admired in the literature of their own period. It hardly sounds logical and fair.

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[49] For a detailed exposition of Goyal's views in this regard, see his *Gupta Sāmrājya kā Itihāsa*, Meerut, 1987, pp.419-26.

[50] Goyal's views on the writing of political history of ancient India are best expressed in his lead paper, 'Need of a New Approach to the Writing of Political History of Ancient India', in G.C. Pande, S.K. Gupta and Shankar Goyal (eds.), *op.cit.*, pp.1-17. For the new political history of ancient India as reformulated by him vide his *A History of the Imperial Guptas*, Allahabad, 1967; *Harsha Śilāditya*, Meerut, 1987; *Nanda-Maurya Sāmrājya kā Itihāsa*, Meerut, 1988.

[51] Also see my articles, 'Sāmpradāyiktā aura Itihāsa-Lekhana', in *Dr. Sampurnanand Commemoration Volume*, to be published by the Sampurnanand Sanskrit Vishwavidyalaya, Varanasi, and 'Gupta Itihāsa Lekhana meṅ Navīna Pravṛittiyāṅ', in *Professor Lallanji Gopal Fecilitation Volume*, ed. T.P. Verma, to be shortly published.

[52] Goyal, S.R., *Gupta Sāmrājyā kā Itihāsa*, p.425.

[53] *Ibid.*, p.424.

Jha commits another illogicality also. He laments that there is no description of common man in the eulogies of the Gupta emperors. This lamentation is misplaced, for such a description cannot be found in royal edicts. Do we find the description of the activities of 'common man' in the royal edicts of any ancient culture? If we want to reconstruct the life of common man, we should study folk literature, folk life as depicted in the *Jātakas, kathā* literature, *Purāṇas* etc., folk songs, festivals, popular celebrations, folk art in the form of terracottas, the gateway reliefs of Sāñchī, the *vedikā* reliefs of Bharhut etc., and not the royal edicts or court literature or court art. V.S. Agrawala, for example, used such material for the reconstruction of ancient Indian folk religions, and not the *Vedas, Upanishads, Gītā* and other religio-philosophical texts.[54] Jha evidently expects material for the study of common man at a wrong place.

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[54] Agrawala, V.S., *Prāchīna Bhāratīya Loka Dharma*, Ahemdabad, 1964.

Part II

POLITICAL HISTORY

6

Ghaṭotkacha: The King Kācha of Coins

Sibesh Bhattacharya

Kācha coins are undoubtedly amongst the most enigmatic ones in the whole series of Gupta gold coins. Despite Allan's strong assertion that the coins are to be attributed to Samudragupta[1] the question still remains very much open and merits re-consideration. It can hardly be any longer seriously contested that Kācha belonged to the Gupta dynasty. Even if we set aside the striking similarity of the Kācha coins with the early Gupta gold coinage, the evidence of Bayana hoard alone is enough to settle at least this aspect of the Kācha problem. The large Bayana hoard of 1821 coins, in fact the largest yet discovered in the country, contains not a single piece which does not belong to the Imperial Guptas.[2] This should now be regarded as finally settled.[3]

But the crux of the problem is not whether we are to attribute Kācha to Gupta dynasty or not; it is to find a place for him in the Gupta genealogy. At the moment three theories hold the field: (I) that Kācha is identifiable with Samudragupta,[4] (II) that Kācha was a rival brother of Samudragupta who contested his succession,[5] and (III) that Kācha was Rāmagupta,[6] Samudragupta's successor. Repeated volte-face of scholars like V. Smith[7] and A.S. Altekar[8] would give us an idea of how knotty the problem is. The old view that Kacha was probably Ghaṭotkacha,[9] the father of Chandragupta I is now rejected almost unceremoniously by the scholars on the subject.[10] However, a considerable case can be made for at least partially reviving this theory. Altekar's opinion that "Ghaṭotkacha was a mere feudatory and could hardly have issued any coins"[11] is far from certain. The application of the humble title of *mahārāja* is no sure proof of his feudatory status. Independent kings of considerable power are known to have been content with this modest appellation.[12] The assumption of grandiloquent titles was yet to become fashionable among Hindu kings.[13] That Ghaṭotkacha was a king of some consequence is suggested by the Vākāṭaka inscriptions of Prabhāvatī which begin the genealogy of the Gupta monarchs with the name of Ghaṭotkacha.[14] One is tempted to argue that Ghatoṭkacha was the first prominent ruler of the dynasty. He was surely a more important ruler than his predecessor.

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[1] Allan, J., *Catalogue of the Coins of the Gupta Dynasties and of Śaśāṅka, king of Gauḍa, in the British Museum* (*BMC, GDS*), Introduction, p.xxxii.

[2] Altekar, A.S., *Catalogue of the Gupta Gold Coins in the Bayana Hoard (Bayana Hoard)*, Introduction.

[3] Curiously enough Dr. Altekar, the editor of the *Bayana Hoard*, though on the whole accepted the Kācha coins to be Gupta coins, yet still believed in "the possibility of Kācha being a king not belonging to the Gupta dynasty and challenging its supremacy sometime after the death of Chandragupta I and before the accession of Chandragupta II". Altekar, *Bayana Hoard*, pp. lxxv-lxxvi. This excessive scepticism is unnecessary.

[4] The view was originally propounded by J. Fleet in *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* (*CII*), Vol.III, p.27. It was supported by Smith, (*JRAS*, 1889, pp.75-76), Allan (*BMC, GDS*, p.xxxii) and Raychaudhuri (*Political History of Ancient India*, Sixth Edition, p.533) etc.

[5] Suggested originally by Rapson. Smith supported it in *JRAS*, 1893, p.95 but later gave it up. Also see Rev. Heras, *ABORI*, Vol.IX, (1927-28), pp.83-89 and P.L. Gupta, *JNSI*, Vol.X.

Coming to an analysis of Kācha coins, the first thing that strikes one is their similarities with the coins of Samudragupta. The reverse of the *aśvamedha*, tiger-slayer and battle-axe types of coins of Samudragupta is closely similar to that of the Kācha coins, while the obverse of the latter seems to be a minor variation of the obverse of the standard type of coins of Samudragupta. Then the obverse legend is but a paraphrasing of the legend of the archer type of coins of Samudragupta. These points, so well emphasised by a number of scholars,[15] hardly need repetition. We might also remember here that in the Tanda hoard, out of the twenty-five coins, except the two coins of Chandragupta I the rest belonged to Samudragupta (*aśvamedha* and battle-axe types) and Kācha.[16] Significantly enough, all these three types, *aśvamedha* battle-axe and Kācha, as far as the reverse design is concerned, have a remarkable family likeness. Granting Altekar's argument[17] that similarities of design and legend are not necessary proofs of the identity of issuer, the circumstantial evidences and the law of probability very strongly indicate that the Kācha coins were issued by Samudragupta.

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[6] Bhandarkar, D.R., *Malaviya Commemoration Volume*, p.189; Altekar, *JNSI*, Vol.IX, Pt.II, pp.131-36. Later, however, in *Bayana Hoard*, p.lxxv, Altekar modified his views and wrote "After the discovery of copper coin of Rāma Gupta in 1951 in Malwa, the most plausible view to suggest is that Kācha was probably an elder brother of Samudragupta who successfully contested his throne for some time."

[7] For Smith's different views see *JRAS*, 1889, pp.75-76; *JRAS*, 1893, p.81; *JRAS*, 1897, p.19; *IA*, 1902, p.259 and *Catalogue of the Coins in the Indian Museum, Calcutta*, (*IMC*), Vol.I, p.96.

[8] *JNSI*, Vol. IX, pp.131-36; *Bayana Hoard*, p.lxxv, *The Coinage of the Gupta Empire*, pp.78-87.

[9] *JASB*, XXIV, pp.487-89; *JASB*, LIII, Pt. I, pp.169-71; *Arch. Surv. West. Ind.*, II, p.36.

[10] Altekar, *The Coinage of the Gupta Empire*, p.79.

[11] Altekar, *Bayana Hoard*, p.lxxv.

[12] Leaving aside the earlier Maurya and Śuṅga dynasties etc. we also find powerful kings of the Vākāṭaka, Bhāraśiva and Magha dynasties assuming the simple title of *Mahārāja*. Bühler, *IA*, XII, pp.239 ff; Fleet, *CII*, pp.236 ff., Sahni, *Ep Ind.*, XVIII, p.160 etc.

[13] *Allahabad Univ. Studies*, Ancient History Section, 1963-64, pp.64ff.

[14] Pathak, K.B. and Dikshit, K.N., *Ep. Ind.*, XV, pp.41 ff.; Gupte, Y.R., *JRASB* (*NS*), XX, pp.58 ff. The passage in question was translated wrongly by the original editors; see Sircar, D.C., *Select Inscriptions*, p.412, n.3.

The case for Samudragupta becomes immeasurably stronger by the occurrence of the *biruda* '*Sarvarājochchhettā*' on the reverse. The epithet has been used for Samudragupta in several Gupta inscriptions,[18] and for Samudragupta alone. This quite securely establishes the fact that the issuer of the coin was Samudragupta. Such a weighty argument cannot be brushed aside by assuming that 'Exterminator of all kings' was an empty *biruda* of a predecessor,[19] presumably a brother of Samudragupta who ruled for a short while and that Samudragupta took over the *biruda* from his brother and later gave substance to it by his victories.

Yet, it is extremely difficult to identify Kācha with Samudragupta. R.D. Banerjee writes "But up to this time coins of the same Gupta king bearing two different names in addition to the *biruda* or the *-āditya* name have not been discovered. The established practice of the Gupta coins is to put the real name of the king on the margin of the obverse or at the foot of the royal figure in a vertical line and his *birudas* on the reverse or elsewhere. All different types of the gold coins of Samudragupta, Chandragupta II, Kumāragupta I and Skandagupta show the actual name of the king on the obverse either in the margin or at the foot of the royal figure. Regarded in this light the group of extremely rare gold coins bearing the name of Kācha must be either issues of some other prince of that name or memorial medals struck by Samudragupta for a relative of that name".[20] Here I think is the clue to our riddle—the reverse strongly suggesting the coin to be an issue of Samudragupta and the obverse pointing out with equal strength that Kācha is distinct from Samudragupta—for, the riddle disappears if we take these coins to be memorial medals struck by Samudragutpa. This at the moment seems to be the most reasonable solution of the question of their attribution.

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[15] Smith, *JRAS*, 1889, pp.75-76; Allan; *BMC, GDS*, p.xxxii, etc.

[16] Allan, *op.cit.*, p.cxxviii; Smith, *IA*, 1902, p.259.

[17] Altekar, *The Coinage of the Gupta Empire*, pp.80-81.

[18] Fleet, *CII*, Mathura No.4, Bilsad No.10, Bihar No.12, Bhitari No.13 and Spurious Gaya Plate No.60; Smith, *IA*, 1902, p.259.

[19] Heras, *ABORI*, Vol, IX (1927-28), p.87.

However, this is but the half of the problem. Even if we accept the thesis that the Kācha coins are commemorative medals the question of the identity of Kācha still remains. But fortunately, we have got a rare and unique piece of Kācha coin from Bayana hoard which contains the key to the question. The coin is described by Altekar as variety B. "Variety B which is disclosed by the present hoard, for the first time, bears a general resemblance to variety A, but it shows slightly greater Indianisation. The king on the obverse wears a *dhotī* instead of the Kushāṇa trousers. The object in his left hand is most probably a *chakradhvaja* rather than an ordinary standard, as in variety A. The goddess on the reverse holds a noose instead of a flower. The most striking feature of this variety is the presence of *garuḍadhvaja* on the obverse which is absent in variety A."[21] The presence of both *chakradhvaja* and *garuḍadhvaja* is indeed highly significant, for the occurrence of the *garuḍadhvaja* proves beyond doubt that Kācha was a member of the Gupta family. Further, and it is very remarkable that in the *Mahābhārata*, Ghaṭotkacha, the son of Bhīma by Hiḍimbā is given as his insignia exactly these two standards, the *chakradhvaja*[22] and *garuḍadhvaja*.[23] This striking parallel is too strong to be disregarded. It revets the citadel of the old theory that Kācha is the abbreviated form of Ghaṭotkacha with remarkable strength.

The next question to be decided is whether the name of Ghaṭotkacha could be shortened into Kācha. The difficulties in the way are not as insuperable as they appear. The king's name is spelt on these coins both as Kācha and Kacha with more or less equal frequency. Out of the sixteen coins of the Bayana hoard seven give the name in vertical legend as Kācha and nine as Kacha.[24] The variety B piece in the Bayana hoard has the name of the king on the obverse spelt as Kacha and not Kācha. Similarly in Smith's *Catalogue*[25] out of the two coins one gives the name as Kacha and the other as Kācha. It cannot, therefore, really be claimed indubitably that the name of the king was Kācha and not Kacha. Kacha can very well be the truncated form of Ghaṭotkacha as we find that on a number of Kumāragupta's coins simply 'Ku' is written for Kumāragupta.[26] But why is it that on certain coins the name is given as Kācha? A probable reason for this distortion is the exigency of metre. The obverse legend *Kāchogāma* etc. is composed in *Upagīti* metre[27] and the demands of the metre made it necessary to extend the name from Kacha to Kācha, to add medial ā (long vowel) to the name. Thus there is no really formidable objection to identify Kacha or Kācha with Ghaṭotkacha.

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[20] *The Age of Imperial Guptas*, pp.8-9.

[21] Altekar, *Bayana Hoard*, p.lxiii-lxxiv, 66-67, pl.VII. 11.

[22] *Mahābhārata*, Droṇa Parva, Ch.23, 76.

[23] *Ibid.*, 31; Dikshitar, V.R.R., *War in Ancient India*, p.372.

[24] Altekar, *Bayana Hoard*, pp.62-67, pl.VI-VII.

[25] *Catalogue of the Coins in Indian Museum*, p.100; also see *JRAS*, 1893, pp.95-96.

In the light of the above facts there is enough ground for believing that Kācha or Kacha coins were struck by Samudragupta in commemoration of his grandfather. In Gupta history we often find the same name or *biruda* or some other common features shared between grandfather and grandson. Chandragupta I's grandson Chandragupta II was christened after him. Similarly, Kumāragupta II of 154 G.E. was either a son of Skandagupta or Purugupta. At any rate he must have been grandson of Kumāragupta I.[28] Skandagupta styled himself as Vikramāditya[29] in imitation of his famous grandfather. Kumāragupta I following his grandfather performed an *aśvamedha* sacrifice and issued coins celebrating it closely following the model of Samudragupta.[30] The tiger slayer type[31] and the rare lyrist type[32] of Kumāragupta recall the same types of his grandfather. Is it entirely improbable then that Samudragupta had a second name Ghaṭotkacha after his grandfather?

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[26] Altekar, *Bayana Hoard*, pp.224 ff. pl.XX.

[27] *Ibid.*, p.62.

[28] Sinha, B.P., *The Decline of the Kingdom of Magadha*, p.64.

[29] Allan, *op.cit.*, pp.117, 122; cf. Fleet, *CII*, p.53; Raychaudhuri, *Political History of Ancient India* (Sixth Edition), p.577.

[30] Allan, *op.cit.*, p.68, pl.XII, Nos.13,14. British Museum pieces show some departure from Samudragupta's type but specimens showing closer imitation of Samudragupta's types were discovered from Bayana Hoard. Altekar, *Bayana Hoard*, p.cviii, pl.XXX, Nos.11-12.

[31] Smith, *JRAS*, 1893, p.124; Allan, *op.cit.*, p.81; Altekar, *The Coinage of the Gupta Empire*, p.190.

[32] Altekar, *Bayana Hoard*, p.cx, pl.XXXI, Nos.4-5.

The Kācha or Kacha coins would remarkably agree with the known types of commemorative medals of Indo-Bactrian kings. The person commemorated is mentioned on the obverse and the commemorator's name or *biruda* given on the reverse. This was the practice followed by Agathocles, Antemachos Theos[33] and Eucratides[34] (commemorating his parents Heliokles and Laodikė). The only possible objection to the theory of commemoration is that we do not find any other instance of this practice among Hindu kings.[35] However this practice might have been borrowed by Samudragupta from Graeco-Kushāṇa numismatic tradition. We find on his coins a number of foreign elements which were "contrary to Hindu canons of propriety".[36] Moreover, in the Gupta coin series we find a number of unique types which do not have a successor or exact parallel e.g., battle-axe type of Samudragupta, couch type and *chakravikrama* type[37] of Chandragupta II, elephant-rider-lion-slayer type,[38] rhinoceros-slayer type[39] and *apratigha* type[40] of Kumāragupta. Thus, the absence of any other instance of similar practice among Hindu kings is not an irrevocable proof against the theory.

In the light of above considerations we may be allowed to conclude that Kācha of Kacha coins were commemorative medals issued by Samudragupta in the memory of his grandfather Ghaṭotkacha.

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[33] Gardner, P., *The Coins of the Greeks and Scythian Kings of Bactria and India, etc.*, p.xxviii, pl.IV, 1,3; XXX, 5,6; *Numismatic Chronicle*, 1882, p.184.

[34] Gardner, *op.cit.*, p.xxiv, 19, pl.VI, 9-10.

[35] Altekar, *The Coinage of the Gupta Empire*, p.82.

[36] *Ibid.*, p.15.

[37] Altekar, *Bayana Hoard*, p.xci, pl.XVIII, 14.

[38] *Ibid.*, p.cvi, pl.XXX, 1-4.

[39] *Ibid.*, p. cvii, pl.XXX, 5-8.

[40] *Ibid.*, p.cx, pl.XXXI, 6-13.

* I am profoundly indebted to Shri J.S. Negi, for drawing my attention to the *Mahābhārata* description of Ghaṭotkacha's standards.

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7

Samudragupta: The Founder of the Gupta Dynasty•

T.P. Verma

1. *Who was the First Emperor of the Gupta Dynasty?*

Although in her Rithapur copper plates[1] Prabhāvatīguptā claims Ghaṭotkacha to be the *ādirājā* of the Gupta dynasty and Skandagupta traces his genealogy from the same king in his Supia stone-pillar inscription,[2] in his Prayāga *praśasti* Samudragupta announces his descent from Śrī Gupta, his great-grand-father.[3] But since these two early kings are simply styled as *mahārāja* in Samudragupta's inscription, a fact which is repeated in many subsequent Gupta epigraphs, they are considered to be insignificant, sometimes as feudatory rulers by most scholars.[4] Opinions are also divided about the first emperor of this dynasty. .V.A. Smith,[5] followed by A.S. Altekar,[6] R.C. Majumdar,[7] S.V. Sohoni,[8] S.K. Maity,[9] Upendra Thakur[10] and some others believe that Chandragupta I was the first Gupta emperor who started the gold coin series. S.R. Goyal[11] believes that although the Chandragupta-Kumāradevī coin type was issued by Samudragupta to commemorate the marriage of his father and mother, Chandragupta I was the first Gupta emperor. At the same time he advocates that it was Śrī Gupta who established the Gupta dynasty.[12] On the other hand Allan,[13]

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[1] Mirashi, V.V., *CII*, Vol.V, pp.35-36.

[2] Agrawala, P.K., *Imperial Gupta Epigraphs*, 1983, p.65.

[3] *Ibid.*, p.7.

[4] Fleet, J.F., *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol.III, p.15, n.4; Allan, John, *Catalogue of the Coins of the Gupta Dynasties and of Śaśāṅka, King of Gauḍa*, p.xiv.

[5] *The Early History of India*, 1924, p.295.

[6] *Coinage of the Gupta Empire*, pp.28-32.

[7] *Vakāṭaka-Gupta Age*, p.124.

[8] *JNSI*, XIX, pp.145-54.

[9] *Economic Life in the Gupta Period*, p.78.

[10] *JNSI*, XXII, p.172.

[11] *A History of the Imperial Guptas*, (*HIG*) 1967, pp.115ff.

[12] *Gupta Sāmrājya kā Itihāsa*, (Hindi), 1987, pp.19ff.

[13] *Catalogue of the Coins of the Gupta Dynasties and of Śaśāṅka, King of Gauḍa, in the British Museum*, pp.lxiv ff.

S. Chattopadhyaya,[14] V.S. Pathak[15] and many others are of the opinion that this coin type must have been issued by Samudragupta as a commemorative issue.

The reason behind this divergence of opinion lies in the epigraphic and numismatic evidences which have been variously interpreted by the scholars. We propose to analyse these evidences. First we take up the epigraphic ones.

1.1 *Epigraphic Evidence*

1.1.1 *The Allahabad Pillar Inscription*

In the Allahabad pillar inscription Samudragupta introduces himself as follows :

'...*mahārāja-śrī Gupta-prapautrasya, mahārāja-śrī Ghatotkacha-pautrasya, mahārājādhirāja-śrī-Chandra gupta-putrasya, Lichchhavi-dauhitrasya, mahādevyāṁ Kumāradevyāmutpannasya mahārājādhirāja-śrī Samudragupta*....[16]

'....of the *Mahārājādhirāja*, the glorious Samudragupta,—who was the son of the son's son of the *Mahārāja*, the illustrious Gupta; —who was the son's son of the *Mahārāja*, the illustrious Ghaṭotkacha; —who was the son of the *Mahārājādhirāja*, the glorious Chandragupta (I) (and) the daughter's son of Lichchhavi, begotten on the *Mahādevī* Kumāradevī;....[17]

Thus, in this passage, Samudragupta gives names of his three predecessors. It was customary in India that whenever a dynasty was established its founder introduced himself by giving the names of his predecessors, usually three but sometimes only two. This rule was observed even in those families which did not have very glorious record and the predecessors of the founder of the royal glory had been only petty local chiefs, dependent or independent. This fact has not attracted the attention of scholars. We for the first time dealt with this issue in connection with the history of the Lichchhavis of Nepal.[18]

1.1.2 *The Supia Pillar Inscription*

In the Allahabad inscription the citation of the three earlier generations is in the form of adjectives of Samudragupta. All the subsequent epigraphs of the dynasty, in which genealogy is given, quote these lines without any alteration. Of course, the Supia inscription of Skandagupta traces the Gupta genealogy from Ghatotkacha, but all other epigraphs start with Samudragupta as the first king and mention the three earlier rulers as his predecessors. For example, the Bhitari pillar inscription of Skandagupta gives the Gupta genealogy thus:

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[14] *Early History of Northern India*, p.143.

[15] *JNSI*, XIX, pp.135ff.

[16] Fleet, J.F., *op.cit.*, p.8, lines 28-29.

[17] *Ibid.*, pp.15-16.

[18] Cf. Gopal, Lallanji and Verma, T.P., *Studies in the History and Culture of Nepal*, 1977, Varanasi, pp.42ff.

'The son of the *Mahārājādhirāja*, the glorious Samudragupta who was the exterminator of all kings; who had no antogonist (*of equal power*) in the world; whose fame was tasted by the waters of the four oceans; who was equal to (the gods) Dhanada, Varuṇa, Indra and Antaka; who was the very axe of (the god) Kṛtānta; who was the giver of many millions of lawfully acquired cows and gold; who was the restorer of the *aśvamedha*-sacrifice that had been long in abeyance; who was the son of the son's son of the *Mahārāja*, the illustrious Gupta; who was the son's son of the *Mahārāja*, the illustrious Ghaṭotkacha; (and) who was the son of the *Mahārājādhirāja*, the glorious Chandragupta (I) (and) the daughter's son of the Lichchhavi; who was begotten on the *Mahādevī* Kumāradevī—(*was*) the most devout worshipper of the Divine One, the *Mahārājādhirāja*, the glorious Chandragupta (II) who was accepted by him; who was begotten on the *Mahādevī* Dattadevī; (and) who was himself without an antagonist (*of equal power*). His son (was) the most devout worshipper of the Divine One, the *Mahārājādhirāja*, the glorious Kumāragupta, who meditated on his feet (and) who was begotten on the *Mahādevī* Dhruvadevī. The son of him, the king who was renowned for the innate power of (his) mighty intellect (and) whose fame was great (is) this (present) king by name Skandagupta...etc.'

This passage is enough to illustrate that all the Gupta kings traced their imperial genealogy from Samudragupta and not from Gupta, the great-grand-father of Samudragupta. Chandragupta I was never considered by the Gupta kings as the first king of the dynasty. Our statement finds support from the Supia inscription of the time of Skandagupta where all the previous kings are eliminated and the Mahārāja Śrī Samudragupta is said to belong to the *pravarddhamāna* family of Śrī Ghaṭotkacha. Here, Chandragupta I, the father of Samudragupta, is not mentioned at all. Here, Chandragupta I[19] stands in the same class as Gupta and Ghaṭotkacha. The title *Mahārājādhirāja* to him should not be taken to mean much. He was not the first independent king of that dynasty and we should not expect any inscription or coin from him. Goyal, at one place argues that 'the first three Gupta kings ruled for about 50 years but no epigraph of these are available'.[20] But if our submission is correct no epigraph of these kings should be expected because Samudragupta was the first member of his family to have attained royal status which was necessary to issue epigraphs in his name.

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[19] Cf. Verma, T.P., *JNSI*, XXXIII, pp.44ff.

1.1.3 *The Chāṅgunārāyaṇa Inscription of Mānadeva*

We have many instances where the first important king introduces himself by giving the names of his two or three predecessors. Mānadeva was the first Lichchhavi king of Nepal. He introduces himself in his Chāṅgunārāyaṇa inscription and informs that his great-grand-father was Vṛsha, grand-father was Śaṅkaradeva and father was Dharmadeva.[21] Some Nepalese scholars argue that the epigraphs of the predecessors of Mānadeva must have been in existence. They have attempted to attribute this or that epigraph to one or the other predecessor of Mānadeva, but without much justification. Hari Ram Joshi places the undated Svayambhū inscription[22] before Mānadeva, and, restoring the damaged 2nd line as *(Śaṅka) radeva narendraḥ,*[23] pleads that this epigraph belongs to the grand-father of Mānadeva. On the other hand, D.V. Vajracharya does not think so and reads the line 10 of the same epigraph '*....Kshetrañchakshayaṁ dattam Śrī Mānavihāre.*'[24] Joshi himself restores this line as '*...Kshetrañchakshayaṁ dattam...navihāre.*'[25] But if there is a reference to the Mānavihāra in this inscription, it cannot belong to Mānadeva's grand-father Śaṅkaradeva's time. Thus Joshi's restoration of the name of Śaṅkaradeva is erroneous.

Vajracharya also attributes an inscription to the time of Vṛshadeva, the great-grand-father of Mānadeva.[26] The date and name of the king in this inscription is not decipherable but the title of the king has been read as '*bhaṭṭāraka mahārāja śrī*', while the Chāṅgunārāyaṇa inscription of Mānadeva refers to the name of Vṛshadeva without the prefix *śrī*. In his earliest inscription Mānadeva calls himself only *rājñaḥ* or

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[20] Goyal, S.R., *Gupta Sāmrājya ka Itihāsa*, 1987, p.191.

[21] Sircar, D.C., *Select Inscriptions*, Vol.I, p.379.

[22] *Nepal Ko Prāchīna Abhilekha*, (Chaitra, 2030 V.S.), Kathmandu, p.1.

[23] *Ibid.*, p.3.

[24] *Lichchhavi Kāla kā Abhilekha*, (Ashāḍha, 2030 V.S.), Kathmandu, p.75.

[25] *Op. cit.*, p.3.

[26] *Op. cit.*, 'Chabhil Inscription', pp.1ff.

nṛpati. It is only in the Pālanchok inscription of Vijayasvāminī of the year 425 (A.D. 503) that Mānadeva is mentioned as *Bhaṭṭāraka Mahārāja*.[27] The year 503 A.D. falls in the 39th regnal year of Mānadeva but this inscription is not an official record; it is a private one.[28] On the other hand, two years later in *saṁ*. 427 (A.D. 505) in the Sūryahāṭa inscription of Vijayavatī,[29] daughter of Mānadeva from his queen Bhoginī, Mānadeva is again mentioned as *nṛpati* only. Thus it is doubtful if the title of *Bhaṭṭāraka Mahārāja* was borne by Mānadeva. His predecessors Vṛshadeva and Śaṅkaradeva are mentioned without the prefix *śrī* and are called simply *rājā* and, therefore, the high sounding title of *Bhaṭṭāraka Mahārāja* for Vṛshadeva seems far-fetched. This title is regularly used in the records of Vasantadeva who calls his father *Paramadaivata Bappabhaṭṭāraka Mahārāja*.[29] This epithet must have been used for his father Mahīdeva, the son of Mānadeva, who had a very short rule of less than a year.

Thus, we can conclude that Mānadeva was the first ruler of the Lichchhavi dynasty of Nepal who started the tradition of engraving epigraphs and, therefore, it is futile to go in search for the inscriptions of his predecessors.

In his Khalimpur copper plate inscription, Dharmapāla, the Pāla emperor, also introduces himself by referring to his three predecessors Dayitavishṇu, Śrī Vapyaṭa and Śrī Gopāla.[30] The first independent king of the Gāhaḍavālas was Chandradeva who in his inscriptions mentions the names of his two ancestors, viz. Yaśovigraha and Mahīchandra without prefixing *śrī* to their names.[31] Many more such instances may be cited.

To conclude, we can safely infer from the epigraphic evidence that Samudragupta was the first Gupta emperor and not his father Chandragupta (I). The title of *Mahārājādhirāja* ascribed to Chandragupta does not mean much. It only means that he was the honoured father of a *Mahārājādhirāja*. Therefore, we should not expect to find his epigraphs or coins.

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[27] *Ibid*., p.67.

[28] D.R. Regmi holds that this Vijayasvāminī was the wife of Mānadeva, vide *Ancient Nepal*, 3rd edn. 1969, p.121. But the meaning of the inscription is clear. She was the wife of a householder named Samrāṭa.

[29] Cf. Gnoli, *Nepalese Inscriptions in Gupta Characters*, Rome, (1956), No.XII and following epigraphs.

[30] Mukherjee and Maity, *Corpus of Bengal Inscriptions*, 1967, p.96

[31] *EI*, IX, pp.301ff., 'Chandravati plate of Chandradeva, Saṁ. 1148'.

1.2 *The Chandragupta-Kumāradevī Coin Type*

The importance of this coin-type for Gupta history may be discerned from the volume of discussion on it. All types of hypotheses and speculations have been advanced. The coins contain on their obverse the figures of the royal couple. They are shown standing, facing each other, the king to the right and the queen to the left of the observer. To identify the figures the legend *Chandraguptaḥ* is given on the male side and *Śrīkumāradevī* or *Kumāradevīśrī* on the female side. The king is shown holding some thing in his raised right hand while the queen is seeing it with attention with her right hand resting near the hip. On the reverse a goddess on lion is seen with the legend *Lichchhavayaḥ*.

Various hypotheses have been forwarded about the issuing authority of these coins. Three claimants are considered: Samudragupta, Chandragupta I and the Lichchhavis. Altekar holds that these coins were issued jointly by Chandragupta I and his queen Kumāradevī, the Lichchhavi princess. But many other scholars appear to take them as commemorative medals. But there is hardly any clue to the commemorator. Altekar remarks that "A commemorator while commemorating his parents or predecessors rarely fails to indicate his indentity by giving his own name on the reverse." But the reverse legend *Lichchhavayaḥ* cannot be explained satisfactorily. Dr. Agrawala suggests that it may be construed as *Lichchhavayaḥ jayanti* viz. the 'Lichchhavis are victorious' and in that case the legend *Lichchhavayaḥ* may be regarded as the name of the commemorators. He also states that "the numismatic evidence is predominantly in favour of the issue being a commemorative medal struck sometime in the reign of Samudragupta himself."[32] But V.S. Pathak rightly remarks that 'findspot, devices, metallurgy, conventions and sequence—in fact all numismatic evidences unequivocally point out that it is a Gupta issue rather than a Lichchhavi coin."[33] It eliminates the claim of the Lichchhavis.

Altekar is the greatest advocate of the theory that this coin was a regular issue of Chandragupta I, the father of Samudragupta, whom he considers the first emperor of the Gupta dynasty. On the basis of the phrase *'Lichchhavidauhitra'* occurring in Samudragupta's Prayāga *praśasti* and *'Lichchhavayaḥ'* on the coin-type under discussion alongwith the figures of Chandragupta and Kumāradevī, Smith proposed that 'by means of this matrimonial alliance Chandragupta succeeded to the power previously held by his wife's relations and secured a paramount position in Magadha and the neighbouring countries.'[34] Allan, on the other hand, believes that the 'kingdom of Vaiśālī was one of his (i.e. Chandragupta I's) earliest conquests and his marriage with Kumāradevī was one of the terms of the treaty of peace.'[35] Altekar goes one step further and suggests the theory of 'joint rule' of Chandragupta and Kumāradevī because, in his opinion, the latter was a queen in her own right. He cites an instance from the history of England when in 1689 Mary II was the heiress of the throne and her husband William III was invited by the Parliament to rule as a King.[36] Goyal holds that 'the alliance of the Guptas with the Lichchhavis resulted in the amalgamation of the two states which enabled Chandragupta I to assume the imperial title Mahārājādhirāja',[37] but he does not believe that Kumāradevī was 'the heiress of the territory of the Lichchhavis' or 'a queen in her own right.' Basing on the *dvyāmushyāyaṇa* theory of Pathak[38] he advocates that the real successor of the Lichchhavi chief was Samudragupta and not the latter's mother or father. Here he indulges in speculation and states that 'since the father of Kumāradevī did not have a male issue and, obviously, died before the demise of Chandragupta I, the latter may have acquired the *actual control* of the Lichchhavi state long before the accession of Samudragupta.... As we have shown elsewhere, Chandragupta I married Kumāradevī in c.305 A.D. and ascended the throne after the death of his father Ghaṭotkacha in 319 A.D. The demise of his father-in-law, who, obviously belonged to the generation of Ghaṭotkacha, must have taken place not very long before or after the latter date. So, not very far removed from this date Chandragupta I acquired factual control of the Lichchhavi state and began to rule over it *in the name of his son Samudragupta who was a minor at that time'*.[39] (italics ours).

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[32] Quoted by V.S. Pathak, *JNSI*, XIX, pp.138-39.

[33] *Ibid.*, p.139.

Now we should examine this theory of the amalgamation of two states through matrimonial alliance, or the 'joint rule'. When Smith suggested and Allan picked up the theory of the joint rule, they did so because of their different cultural and social background. It is strange that Majumdar, Altekar and others not only accepted this theory without questioning it but also tried to support it with new arguments. But the example of William III and Mary II, advocated by Altekar, in this case is not relevant. We cannot quote a single Indian instance where a state was merged with another as the result of matrimonial alliance. The daughter never inherits the property of her father. But the daughter's son (*dauhitra*) (a male, not female) can inherit the property of the maternal grandfather. But we can cite no example from Indian history, except the proposed instance of Samudragupta, where two kingdoms were merged on account of such an arrangement.[40] Sohoni was the first scholar to enquire into the true meaning of 'joint rule' (*JNSI,* XIX, p.147) and suggest that "If there had been any joint administration, it would have been more likely to be that of Chandragupta I and either his father-in-law or brother-in-law and not Chandragupta I and a clan". Even if we do not concede this, Dr. Altekar's the-ory weakens furthers when we remember that, leaving aside this hypothetical case, there is no other instance of a 'joint rule' of a king and queen in Indian history nor is it conceived of in any political theory of ancient India.

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[34] Cf. *The Classical Age*, p.3.

[35] *Op. cit.*, p.xix.

[36] *Op. cit.*, pp.28 ff.

[37] *Op. cit.*, p.96. Here it should be noted that while Professor Goyal advocates the cause of free and unbiased history, he does not free himself from the original suggestion of Smith around which most of the historians still argue.

[38] *JNSI*, Vol.XIX, pp.135ff.

[39] *Op. cit.*, pp.96-97.

1.2.1 *Goyal's Theory of Vākāṭaka-Gupta Conflict and Dauhitra Politcs*

Goyal has no objection to the hypothesis of 'joint rule' but relying on Dr. Pathak's *dvyāmushyāyaṇa* suggestion, he argues that it was Samudragupta and not Kumāradevī who inherited the Lichchhavi kingdom, and that Chandragupta I ruled the joint state on behalf of his son. He suggests such an amalgamation of the Vākāṭaka and the Nāga kingdoms also. This hypothesis of '*dauhitra* politics' called 'Pathak-Goyal hypothesis' by Trautmann, the famous German scholar, traces some sort of political rivalry between the Guptas and the Vākāṭakas. The Vākāṭaka king Pravarasena I and the Nāga king Bhavanāga, according to Goyal, reached an understanding that their two empires be amalgamated after the death of the latter, who had no male issue, and his daughter's son (*dauhitra*) Rudrasena I inherit the Nāga kingdom.[41] But we know nothing about any such merger of the two kingdoms and no other historian has even suggested this. On the contrary, Mirashi holds that Gaṇapatināga was the successor of Bhavanāga.[42] Goyal wants us to believe that 'the Guptas and the Lichchhavis also realised the necessity of having a strong state in the middle Gaṅgā basin to *effectively meet the menance posed by the Vākāṭaka-Bhāraśiva entente.*[43] In other words, the factor that compelled the Guptas and the Lichchhavis to come closer to each other was 'chronologically earlier emergence of the Vākāṭakas as an imperial force in the Deccan and the resultant changes in the pattern of political power in the country'. He further observes that 'By contracting an alliance with the Lichchhavis on the line of the recently concluded Vākāṭaka-Bhāraśiva *entente*, he tried to pay them back in their own coin' and concludes that 'the Gupta-Lichchhavi alliance may be taken as the consequence of the Vākāṭaka-Bhāraśiva *entente'*.[44] But these speculations are highly imaginative. Similarly, Goyal's categorization of the *dauhitras* on the basis of their mention in the ancient Indian epigraphs is forced[45] and cannot be accepted. We feel that the mention of one's maternal grandfather should be taken to mean that the latter was a very illustrious personality of his times and the *dauhitra* took special pride in the mention of this relationship and nothing more. The mention of Bhavanāga, Śarabharāja, Lichchhavis and Chandragupta II by their respective *dauhitras*, should be taken in this light only. It is *just possible* that such a *dauhitra* got some special help from his maternal grandfather; but to speculate on the merger of the maternal grandfather's kingdom with his paternal kingdom is too imaginative.

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[40] *JNSI*, XX, p.7.

[41] *Op. cit.*, pp.89ff.

1.2.2 *Commemorative Nature*

Hence, if Samudragupta mentions himself as '*Lichchhavidauhitra*' and his successors mention this phrase alongwith the whole passage from his Allahabad pillar inscription beginning from '*Mahārāja Śrī-Gupta*' to '*Śrī Samudraguptasya*' it means that they were mentioning only Samudragupta and none of his predecessors. In the Supia stone pillar inscription of Skandagupta, Chandragupta I finds no mention at all.[46] There it begins by saying that 'Samudragupta was born in the family of Ghatotkacha'. Therefore, Samudragupta, not his father Chandragupta I, should be regarded as the first emperor of the Gupta dynasty. So far as the ascription of the title of *Mahārājādhirāja* to the latter is concerned, it should be taken as a courtesy title in his case because the father of a glorious and mighty king like Samudragupta could not be mentioned by his courtier Harisheṇa with a title lesser than that of Samudragupta. It is just possible that Chandragupta I added some territory to his kingdom in eastern Uttar Pradesh, but the greatest contribution of Chandragupta I to the glory of the future Gupta empire was the selection of Samudragupta as his heir-apparent, as stated in the Allahabad and Eran inscriptions.[47] This event must have taken place after some conquests by Samudragupta in the life-time of his father. Not much importance should be attached to the phrase *Lichchhavi dauhitra*. To us it appears that the Chandragupta-Kumāradevī coins were commemorative medals of Samudragupta issued at the time of protracted Aśvamedha sacrifices (*chirotsannāśvamedha*). We also do not subscribe to the theory of V.S. Pathak[48] who believes that they, on their obverse, depict a marriage scene. His theory of the *kalyāṇa-sundara* pose on these coins has rightly been contested by Dani.[49]

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[42] *Vakāṭaka Rājavaṁśa kā Itihāsa tathā Abhilekha*, p.26.

[43] *Op. cit.*, pp.93-94.

[44] *Ibid.*, p.94.

[45] *Ibid.*, p.90, n.2.

[46] Sircar, D.C., *Select Inscriptions*, I, p.317.

1.2.3. *Other 'King and Queen' Types*

At least four Gupta kings are known to have issued 'King and Queen' type of coins including this one. The 'King and Queen' type of Kumāragupta I[50] is almost similar to this type. In both the cases queen is shown to the right side of the king, both standing facing each other. King's right hand is raised and he holds some indistinct object in it. It is alleged that king is offering something to the queen. But the queen is not in a receiving posture. She is simply looking at the object by turning her head towards the king. This is also not a marriage scene. It would be ridiculous to assume that the Gupta kings were in the habit of commemorating their marriages. On the 'King and Queen' type of Skandagupta the queen is seen on the right side of the flan, i.e. to the left of the king. Altekar, perhaps on account of his views about the Chandragupta-Kumāradevī coin type, does not agree with Smith and

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[47] *Ibid.*, p.263. Allahabad Inscription, lines 7 and 8, and Eran Inscription lines 13-14 which state that 'satisfied with devotion, political ability and valour he was anointed, with the title *rājā* by his father in the beginning.'

[48] *JNSI*, XIX, p.141.

[49] *Ibid.*, XX, pp.5-6.

[50] Altekar, *Guptakālina Mudrāyeṅ*, 1972, Pl.14, No.4.

Jagannath that this is 'King and Queen' type. He agrees with Allan that this is 'King and Lakshmī' type of coins. But it is difficult to accept this view because in these coins king is shown much bigger and more dominant on the flan than the female figure. The king is nimbate while the female figure is not. It is not clear on what grounds Altekar feels that the female figure on these coins appears to be of higher class and how he equates it with the Chakravikrama type of Chandragupta II. I see nothing special in the female figure on account of which it can be taken to be the goddess Lakshmī. The figure of Lakshmī on the reverse is shown nimbate. If the obverse female figure was intended to be that of Lakshmī, some indication of it must have been given in it.[51] On the reverse of the coin no.14 on plate 14 of Altekar's Hindi book the figure of Lakshmī is shown standing with her usual attributes in her hands, and therefore one feels no difficulty in identifying her. But the female figure on the obverse of the coin under discussion has no sign on the basis of which she may be taken to be Lakshmī. Altekar has not given details of this coin in his description[52] and has kept silence on the point. We, therefore, beg to differ with Allan and Altekar and accept this coin as the 'King and Queen' type of Skandagupta.

The fourth example is that of 'King and Queen on Couch' type coin of Chandragupta II.[53] Here king and queen are seen seated on a couch. King occupies the right half of the flan and queen the left half, i.e. queen is again shown to the right of the king. Here also king is depicted as having something in his raised right hand which Altekar wants to identify as some ornament or *sindūradānī*.[54] One similarity may be noted in these three coin types (excluding that of Skandagupta) and that is the position of the right hand of the king which has been interpreted as giving some present to the queen at the time of the marriage. But Sohoni rightly points out that the king 'is not *giving* anything' to the queen 'nor she is *taking* it from him.'[55] It would be regarded as most uncourteous on the part of the queen if king is offering something to her and she does not show any gesture to receive it. Probably these depictions do not portray any specific scene of the life of the royal couple; they are just numismatic representations of them.

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[51] See figures on *ibid.*, Pl.14, Nos.12, 13, and 14.

[52] *Ibid.*, p.173.

[53] *Ibid.*, Pl.9, No.6.

[54] *Ibid.*, p.97.

[55] *JNSI*, Vol.XIX, p.149.

1.2.4. *The Rūpākṛti*

Gupta kings made experiments in the field of coinage and they were most creative ones. The couch type coin of Chandragupta II with the legend *rūpākṛtī* should be remembered in this context. *Rūpākṛtī* is probably the most puzzling word in Gupta numismatics. Altekar points out that the medial *ā* stroke of *pā* is quite detached from that latter and may be due to a flaw in the die. In that case the legend would read *rūpakṛtī* and mean 'one who is skilled in dramatic composition.'[56] S.V. Sohoni[57], on the other hand, holds that this word indicates the outstanding 'form and beauty' of Chandragupta II which he possessed according to the testimony of the Arab historians and the drama *Devīchandraguptam*. But H.K. Prasad insists that "....the word is *rūpā* and not *rūpa*. Rūpā may explicitly mean a 'coin' and not the symbol of a coin (*rūpa*). The other word *kṛtī* means one who is fortunate or successful, i.e. proficient, and so the word '*rūpākṛtī*' as a whole would mean "one who is fortunate or proficient i.e. successful (*kṛtī*) in issuing coins (*rūpa*) i.e. a large variety of coins'."[58] Goyal uses this word to derogate the achievements of Chandragupta II, and opines that this monarch "was proud of his 'beautiful figure' as the legend *rūpākṛtī*, probably a mistake for *rūpākṛtiḥ*, found on a variety of his couch type of gold coins, suggest."[59] But we have shown elsewhere[60] that the word *rūpākṛti* or *rūpākṛtī* should mean a figure (*ākṛti*) for the coin (*rūpa*). The circular legend on the obverse of the couch type coins is *Devaśrī mahārājādhirāja Śrī Chandraguptasya Vikramādityasya* and the legend *rūpākṛtī* occurs below the couch. Here we notice that it is only on this coin type that we find king's name in the genitive. If we add the word *rūpākṛti*, occurring below the couch of the king, at the end of the circular legend, it will become meaningful: *Devaśrī mahārājādhirāja śrī Chandraguptasya Vikramādityasya rūpākṛtiḥ*' i.e. 'The coin-figure (or the figure for coin) of His Majesty, the Emperor Śrī Chandragupta Vikramāditya.' In this connection we may recall that Skandagupta issued coin with nominative legend such as 'I am Skandagupta, the Lord of earth (who) after conquering the earth conqueres the heaven' (*vijitāvaniravanipatirjayati divaṁ Skandaguptoyaṁ*).[61]

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[56] *Coinage of the Gupta Empire*, p.134.

[57] *INC*, IV, Pt.I, pp.73-74.

[58] *Ibid.*, V. Pt.I, p.25.

[59] *A History of Imperial Guptas*, p.252.

[60] Verma, T.P., *JNSI*, XXXV, pp.159-65.

[61] Altekar, *Coinage of the Gupta Empire*, p.258.

1.2.5 *Samudragupta: The Commemorator*

Thus, nothing special should be read in the position of the figures on the King and Queen type of coins of the Guptas. As regards the Chandragupta-Kumāradevī coins, one need not search the name of the commemorator on them because the commemorator has already disclosed his identity in the three words occurring on the coins under discussion. There is only one king in the Gupta dynasty who can claim his connection with Chandragupta, Kumāradevī and the Lichchhavis; and that was Samudragupta and none else. The issuer of these coins can neither be Chandragupta I, nor Kumāradevī, nor the Lichchhavis; it can be attributed only to him who represents all the three; and he is Samudragupta, the establisher of the Gupta dynasty.

This also answers Dr. Altekar's argument who observes that 'A commemorator, while commemorating his parents or predecessors, rarely fails to indicate his own identity by giving his own name on the reverse.'[62] He than cites the example of some Indo-Greek kings. But here, and at some other places also, he fails to recognise the difference in the cultural backgrounds of these two sets of kings. It was not necessary that the Guptas should have followed the Indo-Greeks. Samudragupta was independent enough to disclose his identity in the way he wished. On his Aśvamedha type coins he gives only the legend *aśvamedhaparākramaḥ*, and not his name. This *biruda* is a common one which can be used by any king who performs the *aśvamedha* sacrifice. Further, the Allahabad inscription of Samudragupta gives no indication, whatsoever, that he had performed any horse sacrifice. But many epigraphs of his successors call him as the one who had performed horse sacrifice which 'was in abeyance since long', and this epithet, like the epithet *sarvarājochchhetā*, was used only for Samudragupta. But for these epigraphical references we could not have been sure that these coins were issued by Samudragupta. Similarly, the clue for the issuer of the Chandragupta-Kumāradevī coin type should be searched in inscriptions, particularly in the Allahabad epigraph. As we have seen, the three words, Chandragupta, Kumāradevī and Lichchhavis, combined together can indicate only to Samudragupta and none else. The theories relating to the joint issue and/or joint-rule were originally proposed by the European scholars. But the instance of William III of England cannot be applied to India in general and the Guptas in particular. In India no instance is found where a kingdom was given in dowry. Similarly, 'a queen in her own right' is also out of question in the Indian context.

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[62] *Ibid.*, p.28.

1.2.6 *Typology*

The numismatic conventions, stylistic development of devices as well as metallurgy are the factors which should also be examined in this regard. The Guptas inherited their currency conventions from the later Kushāṇas. Allan points out that "Samudragupta's standard type is a close copy of the later coins of Kushān type....; practically the only alterations, apart from the legends, are on the obverse, where the Kushān peaked head-dress is replaced by a close-fitting cap, while the trident on the left gives place to a Garuḍa standard (*garuḍadhvaja*), the emblem of Vishṇu.... The reverse type is even more slavishly copied, as we find portions of the back of the throne on the Śaka coins reproduced alongwith the symbol."[63] The gradual development from original reverse may be traced in the Standard, Archer, Chandragupta I, and Battle-axe types. It must be pointed out that the traces of the back of the Ardoksho throne in the Standard & c. types are really quite as meaningless as on the Chandragupta I type, where the goddess is seated on a lion; on no specimens do more than portions of 'the right side' appear."[64] This shows that the Chandragupta-Kumāradevī type belongs to a later stage of the coinage of Samudragupta.

Allan has compared the fabric of these coins and rightly points out that "A comparison of Pl. III. 1, 2 (Chandragupta-Kumāradevī type) with Pl. I. 1-4 (Samudragupta Standard type), of Pl. III. 4, 5 (Chandragupta-Kumāradevī type), with Pl. IV.6 (Samudragupta Standard type), of Pl. III. 8, 9 (Chandragupta-Kumāradevī type) with Pl. I. 14-17 (Samudragupta Standard type)..., reveals a similarity of fabric which suggests that these must be contemporaneous issues."[65] In this way the three types discussed above must be bracketed with one issuer and cannot be separated from one another by a generation. Therefore, the credit to issue the Chandragupta-Kumāradevī coin type can be given to Samudragupta and not to his father Chandragupta I, whose 'dominions were much smaller than those of his son.'

Altekar, however, does not agree with Allan and holds that "the relative closeness to the prototype does not necessarily prove that the type in question is chronologically earlier than another, which shows lesser imitation of the original."[66] He cites the instance of some "coins of the Archer type of Chandragupta II" which "show greater imitation of the Kushāṇa prototype on the reverse than the Chandragupta-Kumāradevī type." He askes "Are we to suppose that some varieties of the Archer type of Chandragupta II are earlier than the so-called commemorative medal type of his father Samudragupta?" He further argues that "Skandagupta's Archer type shows the king wearing Kushāṇa coat and trousers. Is it then to be regarded as chronologically earlier than those coins of the Archer type of Chandragupta II where the king is wearing a *dhotī* ?"[67]

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[63] Allan, J., *BMC, GD*, p.lxv.

[64] *Ibid.*, pp.lxvi-lxvii.

[65] *Ibid.*, p.lxvi. The portions within brackets are added by me.

Here Altekar does not seem to differentiate between the general features and exceptional characterstics. Although he himself admits that the Standard type of Samudragupta's coins is a close imitation of the Kushāṇa proto-type, but in order to support his earlier views[68] he argues that it 'does not necessarily prove....& c.' But to counter his argument one can only say that 'it does generally prove...& c.' and unless there is some strong points against it, the numismatic conventions must be honoured. Altekar himself was aware of the weakness of his argument and, therefore, he put forward an imaginary political situation of joint-rule of Kumāradevī with Chandragupta I citing the instance of King William III of England which we have already discussed.

1.2.7 *Metrology*

Now we will take up the question of the metrology of the Gupta gold coins in respect to the Chandragupta-Kumāradevī coin type. S.K. Maity, who has examined the gold content in some of the Kushāṇa and Gupta gold coins, remarks that "From the stand point of purity the Chandragupta coins are closer to the coins of Wima Kadphises, Kanishka and Huvishka than the gold coins of Samudragupta. We would, thus, favour the view that they (Chandragupta-Kumāradevī type) were minted by Chandragupta I himself, especially as their gold content is appreciably higher than that of any of the coins of Samudragupta."[69] Purely on the basis of weight and gold content he recognises five groups of coins placed in chronological order on the principle of Gresham's Law:[70]

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[66] *Op. cit.*, p.30.

[67] *Ibid.*

[68] *Early Indian Coins and Currency System*, 1970, pp.96-100.

[69] *The Economic Life of Northern India in Gupta Period*, 1957, p.178.

1. Vāsudeva coins of 118 grains (of pure gold)
2. The Chandragupta-Kumāradevī coins of 109 grains (of pure gold)
3. The Archer, Tiger and Lyrist coins of Samudragupta of 104-105 grains (of pure gold)
4. The Standard, Battle-axe, Kācha and Aśvamedha types of Samudragupta and Archer type of Chaṇdragupta II of 98-99 grains (of pure gold)
5. The Archer type coins of Kumāragupta of 92 grains (of pure gold).

On this A.H. Dani observes that "The chronology of the coins of Samudragupta, as given here, upsets the process of evolution built up by Allan on purely numismatic evidence and accepted by almost all the numismatists, and it also breaks the usually recognised numismatic convention, as it presupposes the archer type to be earlier than the Standard type of the coins of Samudragupta."[71]

If one goes into the details of tables of the gold content analysis given by Maity on pages 62-69, one finds that it is not possible to fix the relative chronology of the coins on the basis of weight and gold contents only. Even if we take the coin of one type we find inconvenient variations both in weight and gold content from the view point of fixing relative chronology. Therefore, any conclusion based on the rigid adherence to this is bound to lead to fallacious results. Moreover, Maity's conclusion appear to be guided by the opinions of 'some other scholars' also.

However, his analysis of the Gupta gold coins given in the tables are very important and useful. Here, we would like to reproduce the Table II (p.98) of Maity giving 14 groups of coins:

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[70] *Op. cit.*, 1970, p.62.

[71] *JNSI*, XX, p.5.

Table II

Gr. No.	King	Coin Type	Average weight in air (in grains)	Average percentage of pure gold	Average content of pure gold (in grains)
1	Chandragupta I	Chandragupta Kumāradevī	118.00	91.90	109.00
2	Samudragupta	Standard	116.00	83.50	98.00
3	"	Archer	118.00	88.80	104.00
4	"	Battle-axe	118.00	82.80	98.00
5	"	Tiger	118.00	89.30	105.00
6	"	Lyrist	118.00	87.70	104.00
7	"	Aśvamedha	118.00	82.70	98.00
8	Kāchagupta	Kācha	116.00	83.80	98.00
9	Chandragupta II	Archer	118.00	84.60	99.00
10	"	Couch	118.00	80.50	95.00
11	"	Horseman	118.70	83.49	91.10
12	Chandragupta II	Combatant Lion	120.00	85.16	102.16
13	"	Lion-trampler	119.00	87.60	104.20
14	"	Umbrella	119.80	87.12	104.30

The first thing which attracts our notice in this Table is the average weight in air. The minimum average weight in the Table is 116 grains of the Standard and Kācha types. The next one is 118 grains found in the Chandragupta-Kumāradevī, Archer, Battle-axe, Tiger, Lyrist and Aśvamedha types of Samudragupta, and Archer, Couch and Horseman types of Chandragupta II. The rest three types belong to Chandragupta II with an increased average weights of 119, 119.80 and 120 grains. This increase in the average weight in the Gupta gold coins was maintained by the succeeding Gupta monarchs as has been noticed by all the numismatists. But it is also clear, that the first eight groups (or types) of coins must belong to one and the same king. i.e. Samudragupta, because from amongst the coins weighing on an average 116 grain, there is no dispute about the Standard type, while the Kācha coin may belong either to Samudragupta or to an earlier king (?) called Kācha. In other words, on the basis of average weight consideration the Kācha coins should either belong to a king who supposedly ruled before Samudragupta or to Samudragupta himself. As we shall see a little later, Kācha was none else than Samudragupta himself. Now coming to the average of 118 grains, purely on average weight considerations, one cannot but arrive at the conclusion that the Chandragupta-Kumāradevī coin type should also belong to Samudragupta and none else. Therefore, these fourteen groups (or types) of coins can be attributed to only two kings, i.e. from 1 to 8 to Samudragupta and from 9 to 14 to Chandragupta II.

Now, we come to the problem of the average content of pure gold in the above groups (or types) of coins. We find that in the Chandragupta-Kumāradevī coin type the average percentage of gold is 91.90 and the average content of pure gold is 109.00 grains which is the highest among all the 14 groups or types. This indicates to the nature of this type and shows that it was a special issue and had some emotional reason behind it. In other words this coin type was commemorative in nature. In this connection it should be recalled that the Aśvamedha type of coins of Samudragupta were also minted on the special occasion of that sacrifice and the king obviously intended to distribute them among priests. This appears to be the reason why this type has only an average of 98 grains of pure gold, which is to be found in his Standard, Battle-axe and Kācha (regular) types. But it seems that the Chandragupta-Kumāradevī types were minted for the purposes of presentation among the kinsmen and high officials. The occasion might have been the horse sacrifice (*Aśvamedha*) itself. Most probably this sacrifice was performed at Prayāga (Allahabad) where an official record of his conquest was found engraved on a pillar of Aśoka.[72] It seems that the nature of this *praśasti* did not permit the mention of the occasion but the place of the record[72a] itself indicates that it was written on some very special occasion. His Aśvamedha type coins also point to this fact. Again, in his so-called Gayā and Nālandā spurious copper plates[73] and in several other inscriptions of his successors Samudragupta is remembered as the one who performed horse sacrifice 'that had been long in abeyance.'[74] It will not be unfair to assume that a king like Samudragupta, who had carried his victorious arms upto Kāñchī in the south and established his authority over whole of north India and whose authority was acknowledged by the kings of the far off islands like Siṁhala and also by the Śaka-Muruṇḍas and Devaputra Shāhis and Shāhānushāhis, decided to perform a horse sacrifice and issued a special type of gold coins on the occasion. No other occasion can be imagined than this when he gratefully remembered his parents by these commemorative coins. His identity is disclosed by three words, viz. *Kumāradevīśrī*, *Chandragupta* and the *Lichchhavayaḥ*, which in the words of V.S. Pathaka 'is a numismatic version' of *Śrī Chandraguptaputrasya Lichchhavi-dauhitrasya, Mahādevyāṁ Kumāradevyām=utpannasya Mahārājādhirāja Śrī Samudraguptasya*[75] found in the Prayāga *praśasti*. It thus seems that special attention was paid to the purity of this type because of the emotional reasons.[76]

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[72] Goyal, S.R., *Guptakālīna Abhilekha*, p.19 and *HIG*, p.188.

[72a] We do not subscribe to his view that Allahabad was the political centre of the imperial Guptas in the beginning. See *HIG*, pp.46ff.

Here, I would like to point out that the fact that the political centre of the Guptas, atleast till late in the career of Samudragupta, was in eastern Uttar Pradesh and not in Magadha, is further attested by the find-spots of the Chandragupta-Kumāradevī coins. A.S. Altekar observes that "Their recorded find-spots are Mathurā Ayodhyā, Lucknow, Sitapur, Tanda, Ghazipur and Benaras in U.P. and Bayana in

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[73] The draft of these two records is identical but the script differs. These were found at an interval of about 44 years. On account of difference in script these are regarded as spurious. But these must be copies of the genuine original records. And hence there testimony should not be doubted.

[74] This translation of Fleet, *CII*, III, p.44 and 54, was accepted by H.C. Raychaudhuri (*PHAI*, p.584) and R.C. Majumdar (*A New History of Indian People*, Vol. VI) and many others but V.S. Pathak, Jagannath Agrawal, S.R. Goyal etc. argue that the term *chirotsanna* actually means 'elaborate' or 'protracted' etc. But all the Sanskrit dictionaries agree that *utsanna* means (in such contexts) 'not in use', 'lost', etc. On the other hand, the word *chira*, meaning '(since) long' does not prescribe any time limit. Hence the argument that the horse sacrifice was performed by such and such kings one or two centuries ago cannot be used as a plea to stretch the meaning of the word '*chirotsanna*' as 'protracted' or 'elaborate'.

[75] *JNSI*, XIX, p.141.

[76] It is to be noted here that in India (as well as in other countries of the ancient world) the percentage of gold in a coin did not mean much because every gold coin piece was tested on account of its purity at the time of transaction by means of touch-stone and very sensitive balance used by the gold-smiths.

Bharatpur state. It is rather strange that no finds of his coins should so far have been recorded in Bihar, the home province of the Gupta empire."[77] But now in the light of new researches of S.R. Goyal we must give up the notion that Bihar was 'the home province of the Gupta empire.' He has conclusively proved that the home province of the Guptas was in eastern Uttar Pradesh.[78] From epigraphical material also, found in U.P., one arrives at this conclusion. But the Bhitari pillar inscription of Skandagupta pin-points the place of the humble origin of the Guptas. At Bhitari (in Ghazipur district) Skandagupta established an image of Rāma or Vishṇu (*Śārṅgin*) in honour of his father and donated a village to it. D.C. Sircar[79] observes that "Skandagupta may have installed the image of Vishṇu and granted the village for the latter's worship for the merit of Kumāragupta I on the occasion of an annual *śrāddha* of the dead king." It is noteworthy here that Bhitari could not have been chosen for the *śrāddha* of his father unless it was his ancestral home. Hindus perform *śrāddha* either at Gayā or at their ancestral home. Bhitari, which is very near to Vārāṇasī, cannot be regarded to have been a holy place worthy of performing the *śrāddha* of his father by a king like Skandagupta. So, if there is any element of truth in Sircar's suggestion, then Bhitari should be regarded as the ancestral place of the Guptas. Ayodhyā became their capital either during the reign of Chandragupta I or Samudragupta. There is, however, very little to prove that Pāṭaliputra was the capital of the Guptas. We propose to deal with this problem later.

1.3 *The Problem of Kācha*

The coins of Kācha 'are not quite rare.' "There are seven coins of his in the British Museum, three in the Indian Museum and five in the Lucknow Museum; the Bayana hoard contained sixteen of them. Jaunpur, Tanda and Bayana are among the known find-spots of the coins of this ruler."[80] But the problem of the attribution of these coins is a difficult one. There are two main views about it. "According to one school Kācha was identical with Samudragupta; according to other he was different from him and may have been either his brother or his son. The evidence is unfortunately not sufficiently conclusive to prove any of these views."[81] This conclusion of Altekar still seems true because no conclusive proof has come out on the basis of which we can form a definite opinion.

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[77] *Coinage of the Gupta Empire*, p.26.

[78] *HIG*, pp.41ff.

[79] *Select Inscriptions*, Vol.I, (3rd ed. 1986) p.324 n.3.

[80] Altekar, A.S., *Coinage*, p.78.

R.N. Dandekar,[82] Father Heras,[83] P.L. Gupta,[84] S.R. Goyal,[85] etc. have suggested that Kācha was a step-brother of Samudragupta who revolted when his father announced the latter to be his successor. In its 4th verse the Allahabad inscription of Samudragupta states that when Chandragupta I announced this decision "the faces of the others of equal-birth (*tulyakulajas*) became melancholy and the courtiers breathed deep sigh (of happiness)". These scholars try to read too much in between the lines and imagine some sort of rebellion by one of the (imaginary) brothers of Samudragupta. But from the verse of the Allahabad inscription it is not clear on which occasion this declaration was made. On the testimony of the *Kaumudī-Mahotsava* K.P. Jayaswal visualises that at that time Chandragupta was on the death bed and soon after this announcement he died. But there seems no reason to imagine such a situation. R.C. Majumdar holds that "The Allahabad *praśasti* vividly describes at the outset how in a full session of the royal court Chandragupta I embraced his son Samudragupta, and declared, in accents surcharged with emotion 'Thou art worthy, rule this whole world.' The poet leaves no doubt that the assembly was held in tense atmosphere and while the royal declaration was received with cheers by most of those present in the court, it caused great discontent and heart-burning to the rival candidates of the royal family. The royal declaration is usually taken to mean that Chandragupta I publicly announced Samudragupta as the heir-apparent to the throne. The words put in his mouth, however, taken literally, mean that Chandragupta I formally abdicated in favour of his son."[86]

Now, to us it seems that there is a fallacy in this contention. If it was an occasion when the appointment of an heir-apparent

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[81] *Ibid.*, p.79.

[82] *A History of the Guptas*, (1941), pp.40-43.

[83] *ABORI*, I, pp.83-87.

[84] *JNSI*, V, Pt. I, pp.33-36 and V, Pt.II, pp.149-50 where he bases his arguments on the *Kaliyugarājavṛttānta* and *Āryamañjuśrīmūlakalpa*. Both these works are unreliable. For the former see the remarks of A.S. Altekar on p.36 of *JNSI*, V, pp. i, and 35-36; *ibid.*, VI, Pt-I and also D.C. Sircar, *ibid.*, pp.34-35. As regards the latter it is vague, ambiguous and sectarian and, therefore, not fully reliable. Cf. Goyal, *HIG*, p.195, n.1.

[85] *HIG*, pp.191-95 and *Gupta Sāmrājya kā Itihāsa*, (1987), pp.80ff.

[86] *The Classical Age*, 1962, p.7.

(*yauvarājyābhisheka*) was made, then at that time a ceremony must have beem performed and, therefore, it must have been known to everybody as to who was going to be anointed as the crown-prince. There were elaborate rites for this ceremony and it cannot be assumed that no one in the court knew what the king was going to declare. Such a dramatic situation is out of question. Further, no king abdicates after the appointment of an heir-apparent. Therefore, the situation visualised by this group of historians, who believe that one son of Chandragupta I rebelled against the decision, seems fallacious. Goyal's conjucture about the political situation based on the Lichchhavi-Gupta politics is also more imaginative than real.[87] For this he has used the text of the *Āryamañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, but he himself doubts its reliability.[88] Thus, we can reject the identification of Kācha with a supposed rebellious brother of Samudragupta.

The other proposition is that Kācha must have been a son of Samudragupta and the elder brother of Chandragupta II. We know that the latter had an elder brother called Rāmagupta who is said to have ruled for a short period after Samudragupta. Chandragupta II killed him and took possession of the throne. Bhandarkar[89] first suggested the identity of Kācha with Rāmagupta. Altekar advocated it with additional arguments.[90] He holds that the *biruda sarvarājochchhettā* on the reverse of Kācha coins has not been used by Samudragupta in his Allahabad pillar inscription. Kācha may have adopted it to express his desire to conquer more kings and excel his father.[91] But how can one accept the opinion of the learned scholar that a king who intended to give away his wife to the enemy, adopted this title in anticipation? Altekar also maintains that "It is possible to argue that the elder brother of Chandragupta had like him two names, Rāmagupta and Kāchagupta, and that he selected the former for his copper coinage and the latter for his gold ones". This argument is palpably spacious.

Although some scholars have rejected the arguments advanced in favour of the identity of Kācha with Samudragupta, we feel that there can be no stronger claimant for the authorship of the Kācha coins than Samudragupta himself.

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[87] *Gupta Sāmrājya kā Itihāsa*, pp.83-86.

[88] *HIG*, p.195, n.1

[89] *Coinage*, p.84.

[90] *Ibid.*, pp.84-87.

[91] *Ibid.*, p.85.

First, let us have a look at the hoards in which Kācha coins are found. Altekar informs us that "...his coins are found only in the hoards of Gupta coins and are usually associated with those of Chandragupta I, Samudragupta and Chandragupta II. Thus, the Tanda hoard consisted of the coins of Chandragupta I, Samudragupta and Kācha. In the small hoard found at Ballia, only the coins of Samudragupta and Kācha were present."[92] Now if we assume for the sake of argument that Kācha is identical with Samudragupta, then these two hoards consist of the coins of only one king, i.e., Samudragupta, because we have already shown that the Chandragupta-Kumāradevī type coins were issued by Samudragupta. "The big Bayana hoard of 1821 coins contained not a single coin of non-Gupta ruler, and still it had 16 coins of Kācha." It is not insignificant that out of 183 coins of Samudragupta in the Bayana hoard there are as many as 136 coins of Standard type.[93] Altekar himself has observed that "The type of Kācha closely resembles the Standard type of Samudragupta. On the obverse of both we find the king standing to left and offering oblations on altar."[94] The resemblance of legends is also very striking. His obverse legend *Kācho gāmavajitya karmabhir-uttamairdivaṁ jayati* is merely a paraphrase of the obverse legend *Apratiratho vijitya kshitim sucharitairdivaṁ jayati* occurring on the Archer type of Samudragupta. "The reverse of his coins is closely similar to that of the reverse of the Tiger-slayer and Aśvamedha types of Samudragupta." The average weight and gold percentage of the Kācha coins and the Standard type of Samudragupta are identical (see Maity's Table given above). Thus, the fabric, metallurgy, general resemblance, legend etc., indicate that the Kācha coins cannot be separated from those of Samudragupta. He can be put neither before nor after him. Further, the epithet of *sarvarājochchhettā* is used only for Samudragupta in the records of his successors. The plea that it is not used in the Allahabad pillar inscription is biased and not acceptable. The so-called spurious Gayā and Nālandā copper plates, which are admitted to be the copies of earlier genuine grants of Samudragupta,[95] use this title for him. Who can say with confidence that we have discovered all the epigraphic material for his reign? With the new discove-ries we have to change our stand frequently. For example, scholars have used the occurrence of the phrase *mahānauhastyaśva-jayaskandhāvāra* to determine the date of an inscription. Fleet observes about the date of the Gayā plate that "...it has the general appearance of having been made somewhere about the beginning of the eighth century A.D. Points which may hereafter fix its date more definitely are (1) use of the Prākrit corruption *uchchhanna*, in the line 3-4; and (2) the opening expression *mahā-nau-hasty-aśva* & c., in line 1; the only other instance of similar expression being in line 1 of the Deo-Barnark inscription of Jīvitagupta II., No.46 above, p.215, and in line 1 of the Dighwa-Dubauli grant of the *Mahārāja* Mahendrapāla, of A.D. 76-62, and of the Bengal Asiatic Society's grant of the *Mahārāja* Vināyaka-pāla, of A.D. 794-95."[96] The Deo-Barnark inscription is attributed to the beginning of the 8th century A.D. D.C. Sircar shifted the date of the introduction of the phrase *mahānauhastyaśva* & c., to seventh century because he found it in Madhuban and Bānskherā epigraphs of Harshavardhana. But Goyal points out that this phrase is also used in the Gunaighar grant of Vainyagupta, dated 506-07 A.D.[97] He observes that it is possible that its use might have started during the time of Samudragupta himself. One wonders if a weak successor like Vainyagupta could have maintained an army consisting of navy, elephants and horses, etc. On the other hand, why the founder of the Gupta empire could not have such an army? The point which I wish to emphasise is that we should not use such evidences to decide the date of inscriptions. Therefore, the occurrence of the epithet *sarvarājochchhettā* in the Gayā and Nālandā plates of Samudragupta should not be rejected and may be used as a positive evidence in favour of his identification with Kācha.

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[92] *Ibid.*, p.78.
[93] *Ibid.*, p.40.
[94] *Ibid.*, p.78.
[95] Goyal, *Guptakālīna Abhilekha*, p.75.

As regards the verse 4 of the Allahabad inscription we believe that it describes some memorable occasion of the life of Samudragupta, probably some important victory due to which the king (Chandragupta I) was pleased to receive him in his court. The *tulyakulajas* must mean other collaterals who envied the achievements of Samudragupta and their faces fell when the king praised him with emotion and asked him to rule the earth. But these collaterals need not necessarily be the step brothers of Samudragupta who supposedly became rebellious. The first eight verses of the Allahabad inscription are in praise of Samudragupta and do not present any coherent description of events. They should not be connected with the prose part of the epigraph. The names of

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[96] Fleet, *CII*, Vol.III, p.256.

[97] Goyal, *Guptakālina Abhilekha*, p.75.

Achyuta, Nāgasena, etc. occurring in this part should not be connected with those in the prose part. The prose part lists his particular achievements. Therefore, the opinion of some scholars that Samudragupta conquered Achyuta, Nāgasen etc. twice, is erroneous. Similarly, the description of his valour in 5th and 6th verses need not be related with the so-called rebellion of Kācha.[98]

We also do not agree with those scholars who believe that there occurred a short period between the reign of Chandragupta I and Samudragupta during which some other king (like Kācha?) ruled. The numismatic data reveal without any doubt that the coins, right from the Chandragupta-Kumāradevī type upto the Lyrist type, including the Kācha type, were issued by one king, and he is Samudragupta. To imagine an 'interloper, who had temporarily eclipsed the power of the Guptas some time after the death of Chandragupta I'[99] will be an injustice to the testimony of the Allahabad inscription which unequivocally informs us that Samudragupta was invited (and thus appointed) by his father to rule over the kingdom because he had proved his might in the life-time of his father. His conquests after becoming a king leave no room for an interloper. And if, for a moment we accept his existence, we cannot imagine that he achieved enough victories to assume the title of *sarvarājochchhettā*, and also had time to issue such gold coins which became models for the future kings. Further, no literary evidence is at our disposal to support this assumption except the doubtful and confusing testimony of the *Āryamañjuśrīmūlakalpa* which should be rejected in this case.

No king can be inserted between Samudragupta and Chandragupta II also, except Rāmagupta, about whom we know from epigraphic, numismatic and literary sources. The proposed identity of Kācha and Rāmagupta was doubted by its proposer himself.[100] Altekar raises this question and says: "*Chakradhvaja* of Kācha is quite peculiar to him and occurs on nobody else's coins. This gives a particular individuality to Kācha and suggests,—but does not prove,—that Kācha is quite distinct from other known Gupta emperors, who do not put this banner on their coins."[101] Here it is interesting to note that except one coin in the Bayana hoard all the coins of Kācha bear only *chakra*-standard in king's life hand. The Bayana specimen contains a *garuḍadhvaja* also in front of the king, in addition to the *chakra*-standard. Basically *garuḍa* and *chakra* both are Vaishṇavite symbols. Garuḍa was adopted as the official royal seal of the Guptas, atleast since the time of Samudragupta. If he had issued a coin with a *chakra*-standard with the name *Samudra* under his arm no one could have doubted its authenticity.

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[98] Goyal, *HIG*, p.194.

[99] Altekar, *Coinage*, p.83.

[100] *Ibid.*, p.87.

[101] *Ibid.*, p.82.

Thus it is not improbable that Kācha was the personal name of Samudragupta given to him by his parents. Perhaps he was known to his intimates with this name. Kācha is not a name unknown to ancient Indian usage. J.F. Fleet informs us that "....other instances, known to me, in which the name Kācha occurs, are in the case of two rulers or chieftains, Kācha I and Kācha II, mentioned in one of the inscriptions in the Ajanta caves (*Archaeol. Surv. West. Ind.*, Vol. IV, p.129, lines 4,6), belonging to a period that is at any rate appreciably later than that of the Early Guptas."[102] But the last remark of Fleet is misleading. Burgess, the editor of this inscription remarks that it "probably belongs to the end of the fifth century or the beginning of the sixth century A.D." Kācha I flourished six generations and Kācha II three generation before Ravisāmba, the author of the epigraph, and, therefore Kācha I must have been a near contemporary of Samudragupta. But the question of their contemporaneity is immaterial for the point which we are discussing. For names time is no barrier. As regards the meaning of the word 'kācha' Fleet observes that it means 'glass, crystal; the string of the scale of a balance, alkaline salt, black salt; wax; & c."[103] But none of these meanings suit a name. P.L. Gupta and S.R. Goyal have interpreted it as 'alkaline ashes' or *bhasma* to suit the *Āryamañjuśrīmūlakalpa* testimony of one Bhasma being the brother of Samudragupta.[104] But it is a far-fatched suggestion.

Here I wish to make a new suggestion. Quichua, the language of the Peruvians, has many words which are of Sanskrit origin. This is proved by the Aryo-Quichua vocabulary prepared by Lopez.[105] A scholar, who spent several years in South American continent, informed me in a seminar that in the Quichua language of Peruvians the word 'kācha' means ocean. It occurred to me at once that if it is so this word can help us in establishing the identity of Kācha with Samudragupta. Now, many proofs of the contact between India and the American continents are coming up. Recently, I came to learn about an ins-cription from Mexico which was discovered and read by Dr. Berry Fell, President of the Epigraphical Society, San Diego, California, U.S.[106] The inscription bears the date (Śaka) 845 (922 A.D.) and records that a certain *Mahānāvika* Vashulana explored the coast line in a merchant ship (*vanijanāva*), reached there in the month of the July (Āshāḍha) that year, wished to name the place as Likibhumi (Lakshabhūmi?) and engraved this inscription in the Kavi (language of Java). This shows that the commercial sailors were maintaining a regular contact with ancient people of South America. Is it not possible that the meaning of the word 'kācha' (i.e. ocean or *samudra*), which went out of vogue in India, continued to be in use among the sea-faring people of Indian origin? Further, may it be suggested the word 'quichua', which was the name of the language of the Peruvians, was derived from the word 'kācha', meaning the language of the sea-faring people?

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[102] *Archaeological Survey of Western India*, Vol. IV, (Report 1975), p.129.

[103] *Ibid.*

[104] Goyal, *HIG*, pp.194-95

[105] Chiman Lal, *India Mother of Us All*, 1968, New Delhi, p.82.

1.4 *Samudragupta and 'Chandra' of the Meharauli Inscription*

Recently S.R. Goyal has launched a sort of campaign to prove that king Chandra of the Meharauli pillar inscription should be identified with Samudragupta and not with his son Chandragupta II. M/s Kusumanjali Prakashan, Meerut, organised a correspondence seminar with a paper written by Professor Goyal on this suggestion and invited other scholars to write reaction papers on it. All such papers were then published in the form of a book.[107] In this seminar in all twenty-four reaction papers were received out of which ten[108] supported the case of Chandragupta II, one (B.P. Sinha) favoured Chandragupta II but had credited it earlier to Chandragupta Maurya, and one (K.G. Krishnan) gave no opinion of his own while twelve[109] favoured Samudragupta's claim and supported Goyal who had presented the lead paper. In the section VI of the book Goyal gave a reappraisal of the problem of the identification of king Chandra and reiterated his views. I need not go into the details of the arguments presented by each side but to me it appears that there is no point in the claim of Samudragupta and if there is any Gupta king who may be given the credit for the achievements described in this inscription it is Chandragupta II Vikramāditya and none else.

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[106] *The Hindu*, Friday September 27, 1985.

[107] *King Chandra and the Meharauli Pillar*, ed. by M.C. Joshi, S.K. Gupta and Shankar Goyal, 1989, Meerut.

[108] 1. Ajay Mitra Shastri 2. Jagannath Agrawal 3. K.D. Bajpai 4. K.K. Thaplyal 5. Lallanji Gopal and Krishna Kanti Gopal 6. Susmita Pande 7. S. Sankaranarayanan 8. T.P. Verma 9. Upendra Thakur 10. V.S. Pathak and V.B. Rao.

[109] 1. B. Ch. Chhabra 2. S.B. Deo 3. M.C. Joshi 4. R. Nagaswamy 5. R.S. Mishra 6. K.V. Raman 7. Shankar Goyal 8. K.K. Sharma 9. S.K. Gupta 10. S.K. Purohit, 11. S.N. Kapoor 12. Shri Arun.

1.5 *Conclusion*

In conclusion we can say that Samudragupta was the first king of the Gupta dynasty. It was he who established the Gupta empire. This is attested by all the epigraphs of his successors who claim descent from him and not from Śrī Gupta. The names of Śrī Gupta, Ghaṭotkacha and Chandragupta I are simply prefixed to the name of Samudragupta in order to provide *him* a genealogy. Coming to the numismatic evidence it is only he who can be credited to have started the tradition of minting gold coinage. The Chandragupta-Kumāradevī coin-type was issued by him, and the Kācha type was also his own. A comparison of the fabric, metrology, legend-system, artistic features of these types and his other six regular types indicates that these were issued by Samudragupta. No other Indian dynast ever issued such an extentive gold coinage either before or after him.

8

Royal Succession in the Gupta Age and the Connotation of the Term *Dauhitra* Occurring in Inscriptions

M.C. Joshi

The policy of matrimonial alliance was persued by the kings of ancient India as an effective means for the consolidation and expansion of their sphere of influence. Bimbisāra of Magadha had stabilized his position by forging matrimonial alliances with Kosala and Lichchhavi states. The matrimonial relations between the Vākāṭakas and the Bhāraśiva Nāgas of Padmāvatī on the one hand and the Guptas and Lichchhavis on the other are such instances from the Gupta age.

I

The Vākāṭaka king Rudrasena I has been described as *dauhitra* of Bhavanāga in the Vākāṭaka dynastic records.[1] The daughter of Bhavanāga was married to Gautamīputra, the son of the Vākāṭaka king Pravarasena I.[2] The frequent description of Rudrasena I as *Bhavanāga dauhitra* in the genealogical portions indicates that much importance was attached to this marriage by the Vākāṭakas. We are told in the Purāṇas that Pravarasena I had four sons.[3] That Gautamīputra had atleast one brother named Sarvasena, who founded the Vatsagulma branch of the dynasty, is evident from inscriptions.[4] Gautamīputra evidently predeceased his father Pravarasena I because the latter is said to have been followed on the throne by Rudrasena I, the son of Gautamīputra and grandson of Pravarasena I.

It is curious to note that after the death of Gautamīputra Pravarasena I was succeeded by the latter's grandson Rudrasena I and not by the eldest of his remaining three sons. This somewhat unusual development seems to be the natural consequence of the Vākāṭaka-Bhāraśiva Nāga marriage alliance. Attempt has righlty been made by V.S. Pathak and S.R. Goyal to interpret the term *dauhitra* in the epigraphs in the light of its reference in the Smṛtis.[5] Daughter's son or *putrikāputra* is incorporated in the list of twelve kinds of subsidiary sons by the Smṛtis.[6] He is also included among the *rikthabhājas* (who inherit the property) by our lawgivers.[7] Adopted, *kshetraja* and purchased sons have been called *dvyāmushyāyaṇa* in some of the Smṛtis.[8] *Dauhitra son* (daughter's son adopted as son) also belongs to the same category. According to V.S. Pathak, *dvyāmushyāyaṇa* "belong simultaneously to two families of natural father and the maternal grand-father who is considered for all religious purposes as father. Manu says that *dauhitra*, in the absence of (natural) son, inherits the whole property and offers *piṇḍas* both to the natural father and maternal grand-father."[9]

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[1] Sircar, D.C., *Select Inscriptions* (*SI*), p.420.

[2] Majumdar and Altekar, *A New History of the Indian People* (*NHIP*), VI, p.38.

[3] Pargiter, F.E., *Dynasties of the Kali Age* (*DKA*), p.50.

[4] Sircar, D.C., *op.cit.*, p.407.

If we read the allusion to Rudrasena I in the Vākāṭaka inscriptions as *Bhavanāga dauhitra* in this context, then the meaning and political significance of the term *dauhitra* becomes more intelligible. It is quite plausible to presume, as Goyal has done, that Bhavanāga having no male issue to succeed him, married his daughter with Gautamīputra with an agreement that his daughter's son will also be his (Bhavanāga's) son of *dauhitra* category. This proposal was highly beneficial to the Vākāṭaka king Pravarasena for it could make Gautamīputra's son a *dvyāmushyāyaṇa* i.e. the inheritor of the two empires of the Vākāṭakas and the Bhāraśivas.[10] It was tantamount to the diplomatic merger of two empires under Pravarasena I's grandson Rudrasena I. Therefore, the former appointed the latter as his own successor too. This will explain, Goyal rightly argues, as to why Pravarasena I was not followed on the Vākāṭaka throne by one of his remaining sons, for that would had made the merger of the two empires impossible. Here, it may be pointed out that the Purāṇas also seem to have preserved somewhat disconnected and confusing account of the *dauhitra's* (Rudrasena I's) accession to the maternal grandfather's (Bhavanāga's) throne.[11]

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[5] Pathak, V.S., *JNSI*, XIX, Pt.II, pp.140, 41; S.R. Goyal (*A History of the Imperial Guptas* (*HIG*), pp.89-97) has applied Pathak's interpretation to Vākāṭaka king Rudrasena I who has been described as Bhavanāga-*dauhitra* in the epigraphs.

[6] Kane, P.V., *History of Dharmaśāstra*, (Hindi), Vol.II, p.881.

[7] *Baudhāyana*, 2.2. 36-37.

[8] Kane, P.V., *op.cit.*, pp.898, 99. When a person allows another person to adopt his son with the understanding that the boy in question will be son of both, the real father and the subsidiary father, such an adopted son is called *dvyāmushyāyaṇa* (*Vyavahāramayūkha*, p.114.).

[9] Pathak, V.S., *op.cit.*, pp.140-41.

[10] Vide Goyal, S.R., (*op.cit.*, pp.91ff.), for a critical analysis of the impact of the Vākāṭaka-Bharasiva marriage alliance on the contemporary history of India. Thomas R. Trautmann ('Licchavidauhitra', *JRAS*, I, 1972, pp.4ff.) has refuted what he calls 'the Pathak-Goyal hypothesis' of dual succession of Rudrasena I and Samudragupta to the Vākāṭaka-Nāga and Gutpa-Lichchhavi states respectively.

II

Another marriage alliance of political importance took place between the Guptas and the Lichchhavis. The Vākāṭaka-Bhāraśiva marriage alliance was the precursor of the Gupta-Lichchhavi alliance. The Allahabad Pillar Inscription refers to Samudragupta as *Lichchhavi-dauhitra.*[12] The importance attached by the Guptas to their matrimonial relation with the Lichchhavis is evident from the frequent allusion to it in the Gupta inscriptions. It seems quite plausible that either Ghaṭotkacha or his son Chandragupta I, probably inspired by the similar political vicissitudes in the South, contracted a marriage alliance with the Lichchhavis. Thus, this development in the North may have been necessitated by the marriage alliance between the Nāgas and the Vākāṭakas and the consequent emergence of the latter as imperial power.[13]

The Guptas did not remain content with mere reference to Samudragupta in their records as *Lichchhavi-dauhitra* or the grandson of the Lichchhavi(s). They publicized the Gupta-Lichchhavi marriage relationship by issuing a separate type of gold coins bearing the names and figures of Chandragupta I and his Lichchhavi wife Kumāradevī on the obverse and the figure of a goddess seated on a lion alongwith the legend *Lichchhavayaḥ* on the reverse.[14] This shows that the marriage alliance between the Guptas and the Lichchhavis was of great political importance for the former. Scholars hold various opinions regarding the Chandradupta-Kumāradevī type of coins.[15] A number of scholars like

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[11] Jayaswal, *History of India*, p.15. See also Pargiter, F.E., *DKA*, p.50.n.29.

[12] Cf. Goyal, S.R., *Guptakālīna Abhilekha*, 1984, p.17.

[13] Goyal, S.R., *HIG*, p.93.

[14] *Ibid.*, p.95, fn.1 for various opinions regarding the controversy about the issuance of these coins.

[15] *Political History of Ancient India*, p.530. See also *Numismatic Supplement*, 47, *JRASB*, III (1937), No.346, for various opinions regarding the attribution of these coins.

Aiyangar,[16] V. Smith,[17] Majumdar[18] and Altekar[19] rightly hold that the outcome of the Gupta-Lichchhavi alliance was the amalgamation of the two states which led Chandragupta I to assume the imperial title *Mahārājādhirāja.* Altekar opined that Kumāradevī was queen in her own right[20] This would mean that Chandragupta's place in the Lichchhavi family was that of queen's husband (prince-consort) and his and Kumāradevī's position was similar to that of William III and Queen Mary of England. The possibility of the joint-state of husband and wife is reflected by their coins also. The coins might have been issued at the time of the assumption of imperial title of *Mahārājādhirāja* by Chandragupta I and the name of queen Kumāradevī was inscribed on the coins at the insistence of the Lichchhavis. But this interesting suggestion cannot be accepted owing to the absence of daughter's inheritance in Indian tradition. The daughter's right to the property of the father is unknown to the Dharmaśāstras. Therefore, Kumāradevī could never have been a queen in her own right. It has rightly been suggested by S.R. Goyal that the Lichchhavi king having no male issue to succeed, might have created the possibility of Kumāradevī's son inheriting the kingdom of the Lichchhavis.[21] We have already seen that the Smṛtis uphold *dauhitra*'s inheritance in the absence of the son.[22] The daughter's son or *putrikāputra* has been included by them among the *rikthabhājas* (inheritors of the property). Viewed in this light, it should not be difficult to comprehend the real implication of the allusion to Samudragupta as *Lichchhavi-dauhitra* in the imperial genealogies of the Guptas. Samudragupta was adopted by his maternal grandfather who had apparently no male issue to succeed. He, therefore, inherited the kingdom of his maternal grandfather after the latter's death. He was the son of *dauhitra* category of the Lichchhavi chief and hence is referred to as *Lichchhavi-dauhitra.* According to P.L. Gupta[23] it is also possible that as an interim arrangement the Lichchhavi state's administration was entrusted to Chandragupta and for political convenience the Lichchhavi princess was also associated and the administration was carried on in the name of the Lichchhavis. He maintains that this assumption of his is supported by coins. The coins bear the name of Chandragupta at the proper place but the title is replaced by the name of Kumāradevī. The word *Lichchhavayaḥ* is inscribed at the place where traditionally the title of the issuer is inscribed.

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[16] *Ancient India and South Indian History and Culture*, p.181f.

[17] *Early History of India*, p.181f.

[18] *NHIP*, p.129.

[19] *Coinage of the Gupta Empire*, p.2.

[20] *Numismatic Supplement*, 47, p.107; *The Gupta Gold Coins of the Bayana Hoard*, Introduction, p.43.

[21] Goyal, *op.cit.*

[22] *Manusmṛti*, IX.131, 132; *SBE*, Vol.XXV, pp.352, 353.

[23] *Gupta Sāmrājya*, pp.238ff.

The arguments advanced by Trautmann against what he calls 'Pathak-Goyal thesis'[24] that Samudragupta inherited the domains of his father as well as his maternal grandfather, though theoretically logical and in consonance with the laws of Manu, completely ignore the practical side of the problem (i.e. the application of the Smṛtic laws in actual practice). According to Manu[25] the son of *putrikā* (appointed daughter) will inherit the whole estate of his maternal grandfather who leaves no son and also[26] of his (own) father who leaves no (other) son. Such a son will offer *piṇḍas* to his father and meternal grandfather both.[27]

If we follow Manu and interpret the term *Lichchhavi-dauhitra* of the Gupta inscriptions accordingly then Samudragupta was not qualified to inherit the two kingdoms simultaneously. He could inherit the kingdom of his maternal grandfather being his son of the *dauhitra* category but had no claims to the kingdom of his father (Chandragupta I), who had other sons (*tulyakulajas*) besides Samudragupta. But this is merely a theoretical position. Technically speaking, we may not call Samudragupta a *dvyāmushyāyaṇa* (who inherits the two properties or estates) but factually such appears to have been the case. He received the Lichchhavi kingdom as a son of *dauhitra* category. Since this was a significant achievement for the Guptas, therefore, Samudragupta's matrilineage was often emphasized in the genealogical records. But the Prayāga *praśasti* explicitly states that Samudragupta was selected as heir by his father Chandragupta I in the open court. This undoubtedly proves Samudragupta's inheritance to his paternal kingdom by virtue of being selected by his father. Thus, he seems to have received two domains simultaneously. Further, the laws of inheritance formulated by

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[24] *Op.cit.* Cf. Goyal, *Gupatakālina Abhilekha*, 1984, pp.46-47.

[25] *Manusmṛti*, IX. 131; *SBE*, Vol.XXV, p.352.

[26] *Manusmṛti*, IX. 132. *SBE*, Vol.XXV, p.353.

[27] *Baudhāyana* (2.2.17) and *Dāyabhāga* (11.2.21) differentiate between *putrikāputra* and a mere *dauhitra*. Cf. Kane, P.V., *op.cit.*, p.915.

Manu are meant for the division of father's property among his sons. Manu advocates the law of seniority when he says that "the eldest alone may take the whole paternal estate, the others shall live under him just as they lived under their father".[28] Though it is hazardous to apply the rules for the division of family estates to royal succession, yet we can adopt the position that the royal succession was also guided by this law, at least theoretically. Trautmann himself seems to accept this position when he criticizes the 'Pathak-Goyal thesis'. But in that case we should also take into account the practical side of the law. The kings by and large were supposed to respect the law of primogeniture. However, there are many instances where this law was superseded by the predilection of the reigning king. The sovereign rulers sometimes entrusted the responsibilities of the kingdom to the younger sons overlooking the claims of the elder ones. This could be due to the special qualities, extraordinary abilities or the invaluable services rendered to the kingdom by the prince in question. The Prayāga *praśasti* of Samudragupta gives an account as to how Chandragupta I appointed his 'worthy' son Samudragupta as his successor.[29] The announcement was well received by the *sabhyas* (nobles) but highly resented by the princes of equal birth (*tulyakulajas*).[30] It is suggested by Goyal that the apprehesion of the probable importance which the Lichchhavis could enjoy as a result of the amalgamation of the Lichchhavi and Gupta states by the accession of Samudragupta found expression in the revolt led by Kācha.[31]

III

King Kācha is known by several gold coins of a single type found from Jaunpur, Tanda, Bayana etc. The absence of his name in the Gupta genealogy had led historians to speculate about his place in the dynasty. That he was a ruler of the Gupta dynasty[32] is evident from the metrology, devices and the find-spots of his coins. His coins are generally found in the hoards of the Gupta gold coins and alongwith the coins of Chandragupta I, Samudragupta and Chandragupta II. His coins remarkably resemble those of Samudragupta in fabric, legend and appearance. In Tanda (Distt. Raibareilly) only the coins of Chandragupta I, Kācha and Samudragupta were found. At Kaserva (Distt. Ballia) the coins of only Samudraguta and Kācha were found. The title *Sarvarājochchhetā* is inscribed on the coins of Kācha. The same title is used for Samudragupta in inscriptions. The metrology of the Kācha coins weighing 116 to 118 grain would indicate that the issuer flourished not after Chandragupta II who began issuing gold coins weighing 120 to 124 grains also. All these facts prove that Kācha was a near contemporary of Samudragupta. On the basis of close similarity of legends, metrology, devices etc. scholars like Allan,[33] Fleet,[34] Smith[35] and Raychaudhuri[36] held the view that Kācha was the original name of Samudragupta. But it may be pointed out here that the similarity of coins merely proves contemporaneity, and not identity of these rulers. Raychaudhuri held that the epithet *Sarvarājaochchhetā* was actually adopted and could rightly be assumed only by Samudragupta. But the title has been used for Chandragupta II also in the Poona[37] and Rithpur copper plates of Prabhāvatīguptā. Moreover, the epithet was never assumed by Samudragupta himself. It has also been suggested that several Gupta kings had more than one names. Therefore, it may be inferred that Kācha was another name of Samudragupta. But all those Gupta rulers, who are known to have had more than one name, issued coins with one name only.[38] There is, therefore, no reason to assume that Samudragupta issued coins under a less familiar name also.

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[28] Bühler, G., *The Laws of Manu*, p.346; *SBE*, Vol.XXV (Reprint 1967). Traces of the law of seniority may go back to the *Ṛgveda* (7.5.6;3.50.3) where Indra's senior position seems to have been recognized.

[29] Cf. Goyal, S.R., *Guptakālīna Abhilekha*, 1984, pp.17-53.

[30] Fleet, *Corpus*, III, pp.11 ff.

[31] *ABORI*, IX, p.83; Goyal, S.R., *HIG*, p.123.

[32] Buddha Prakash (*Aspects of Indian History and Civilization*, pp.80 ff.) and B.S. Sitholey (*JNSI*, XII, Pt.I, pp.39 ff.) held that Kācha did not belong to the Gupta family.

According to Prinsep and Thomas the Kācha coins were issued by Ghaṭotkacha.[39] In the Poona and Rithpur inscriptions of Prabhāvatī as well as in the Supia inscription of Skandagupta, Ghaṭotkacha has been styled as '*Ādirāja*' of the Gupta dynasty. But this fact can hardly prove that he was the *Sarvarājochchhetā* of the coins under discussion. The two names are also basically different. Another attempt to identify

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[33] Allan, J., *BMC, GD*, Introcution, p.xxxii.

[34] *Corpus*, III, p.27.

[35] *JRAS*, 1889, pp.75, 76. Later he revised his opinion and supported the view that Kācha and Samudragupta were two different rulers (*ibid.*, 1893, p.87).

[36] *PHAI*, p.533.

[37] Sircar, D.C., *SI*, pp.412-16.

[38] Gupta, P.L., *op.cit.*, p.245.

[39] Quoted in *HIG*, p.193. See also U.N. Roy, *Gupta Samrāṭ aura unakā Kāla* (Hindi), pp.525, 26.

Kācha was made by D.R. Bhandarkar[40] who held that he was Rāmagupta, the elder brother of Chandragupta II. The name of Kācha was transformed into Rāma by the later writers due to oversight. A.S. Altekar also subscribed to this view.[41] He, however, later changed his opinion as it became obsolete with the discovery of the copper coins of Rāmagupta.[42] Thus, being a contemporary of Samudragupta, Kācha cannot be placed earlier or later than Samudragupta.

R.D. Banerji was of the opinion that the Kācha coins were issued by Samudragupta to commemorate his brother Kācha who died fighting against the Kushāṇas.[43] In the absence of any positve evidence this view cannot be accepted. According to Rapson[44] and Heras[45] Kācha was the elder brother of Samudragupta. As is indicated in the IVth verse of the Prayāga *praśasti* the princes of equal birth resented the accession of Samudragupta. They might have made a common cause against him under the leadership of Kācha who might have been elder to Samudragupta. According to Heras, the Vth and VIth verses of the praśasti, now damaged, probably contained a reference to a civil war which ensued the accession of Samudragupta. Most likely Kācha was killed and the revolt was crushed.[46] P.L. Gupta,[47] has drawn the attention of the scholars to the *ĀMMK* which records that Bhasma, which literally means *kācha* also, was a brother of Samudragupta, who is said to have ruled for three years. The whole account given in this text is useful for this purpose though it is somewhat confused. Alternately, it is also possible that Chandragupta I under the obligation of his marriage alliance with the Lichchhavis appointed Samudragupta as his successor. As discussed above, S.R. Goyal has shown that the reference to Samudragupta as *Lichchhavi-dauhitra* in the genealogical portion probably indicates that he was adopted by his maternal grandfather as a son of *dauhitra* category, a position which entitled him to inherit the kingdom of the Lichchhavis.[48] This was naturally politically advantageous for the Guptas. Chandragupta I, therefore, appointed Samudragupta as his successor or abdicated the throne in his favour. Kācha, who would have succeeded Chandragupta I under normal circumstances, must have resented the decision of his father and opposed the authority of Samudragupta. It is quite likely that Kācha succeeded at the initial stage in establishing his authority as is evident from his coins and the titles inscribed on them. But finally his rebellious rule was put to an end by Samudragupta.

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[40] *Malaviya Commemoration Vol.*, p.189.

[41] *CGE*, pp.78ff.

[42] *Ibid.*, p.162.

[43] *Age of the Imperial Guptas*, pp.9, 10.

[44] *JRAS*, 1893, p.81.

[45] *ABORI*, IX, p.83.

[46] B. Bhattacharya tried to prove, on the basis of the *Kaliyugarāja-Vṛttānta*, that Kācha was a step-brother of Samudragupta. According to this text Chandragupta I had two sons — Kācha and Samudragupta. The elder son Kācha was born of the Lichchhavi princess. Chandragupta I ruled for seven years with the help of Kācha. Samudragupta killed his father and step brother Kācha and became emperor. But this work has been proved to be 'a palpable modern forgery' by R.C. Majumdar (*IHQ*, XX, pp.345ff.) and D.C. Sircar (*JNSI*, VI, pp.34ff.).

[47] Gupta, P.L., *op.cit.*, p.246.

IV

Till some sixty years back, it was an established opinion that Samudragupta was followed in succession to the Gupta throne by his son Chandragupta II, for the genealogy given in the Gupta inscriptions records the name of Chandragupta II after that of Samudragupta. But the discovery of certain literary and archaeological evidences tends to reveal that Rāmagupta ruled for sometime in between Samudragupta and Chandragupta II. S. Lévi discovered the *Nāṭya Darpaṇa* of Rāmachandra and Guṇachandra in 1923 and drew the attention of the scholars to six extracts, quoted there from the drama *Devīchandragupta*[49] ascribed to Viśākha (most likely Viśākhadatta, the author of the *Mudrārākshasa*), which revealed the existence of Rāmagupta. Since then a number of scholars have tried to throw additional light on this question.[50]

We gather from the available fragments of the drama *Devīchandragupta* that the kingdom of coward and impotent Rāmagupta was invaded by a certain Śaka king. Rāmagupta gave his consent to the insulting proposal of the enemy to surrender his queen Dhruvadevī to the invader instead of settling the affair in the battle field. But prince Chandragupta (the younger brother of the king) decided to go to enemy's camp in the queen's garb. This incident is referred to by several other writers of the later period. There is a passage in the *Harshacharita* of Bāṇa stating that Chandragupta, in the guise of a female, killed the Śaka king possessed of lust for another's wife in the very city of the enemy (*aripure*)[51] In the Sanjan plates of the Rāshṭrakūṭa king Amoghavarsha I of 781 A.D., it is stated: "The donor in the Kaliyuga, who was of the Gupta lineage having killed his brother, we are told, seized his kingdom and wife". Here the name of the killer of Rāmagupta is missing and the significant part of the story of Viśākhadatta's drama relating to the murder of the Śaka ruler is not given.

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[48] Goyal, *HIG*, pp.95ff.

[49] *Journal Asiatique*, CXIII, p.201.

[50] Banerji, R.D., Manindranath Nandi Lectures delivered in 1924 in the Banaras Hindu University; Altekar, *JBORS*, XIV, pp.223ff.; XV, pp.134ff.; Bhandarkar, D.R., *Malaviya Commemoration Vol.*, pp.189ff.; Mirashi, *IHQ*, X, p.48; *IA*, LXII, p.201; Saletore, *Life in the Gupta Age*, pp.14ff.; Jayaswal, K.P., *JBORS*, XVIII, pp.17ff.; Heras, *JBRS*, XXXIV, pp.19ff.; Raychaudhuri, *PHAI*, p.553, n.2; Basak, *HNEI*, Intro., p.iii; Majumdar, *NHIP*, pp.161ff.; Winternitz, *Aiyangar Commemoration Vol.*, p.359.

The Cambay plates (930 A.D.) of the Rāshṭrakūṭa king Govind IV refer to the murder by Sāhasāṅka of his own brother. Sāhasāṅka is generally taken to be Chandragupta II.

The *Kāvyamīmāṁsā* of Rājaśekhara also refers to king Śarmagupta (or Senagupta) who gave (not merely agreed to give) his wife Dhruvasvāminī to the Khasa (not Śaka) king. The king Śarmagupta is identified with Rāmagupta.

Śaṅkarārya, the commentator of the *Harshacharita*, while referring to the incident says that the Śaka ruler wanted to have Dhruvadevī, another man's wife, but was killed by Chandragupta, disguised as queen.

Almost a similar story has been narrated in an Arabic work translated into Persian by Abul Hasan (1026 A.D.).[52] In this story, Rawwāl and Barkamāris are two royal brothers. King Rawwāl intended to escape from an invader of his kingdom by offering to surrender his queen to the enemy. The younger brother of the king, Barkamāris, saved the situation by killing the enemy in the guise of the queen. Subsequently he killed his brother and married the widowed queen. Rawwāl of this story is obviously Rāmagupta and Barkamāris is Chandragupta Vikramāditya. The contents of the story and its resemblance with the episode of Rāmagupta suggest that it was originally based on the drama of Viśākha.[53]

The absence of unanimity among scholars on the question of the historicity of Rāmagupta has made the whole problem interesting and engrossing. Smith[54], Raychaudhuri,[55] Basak[56] and several other scholars doubt the reliability of the literary tradition. According to Majumdar,[57] the whole truth would not be known unless more evidence comes to light. However, scholars like Altekar,[58] R.D. Banerji,[59] Mirashi,[60] Saletore[61] etc. do not doubt the historicity of Rāmagupta. Jayaswal[62] was of the opinion that Kācha and Rāmagupta were the names of the same person. Heras[63] held the opinion that the name of Rāmagupta was deleted from the Gupta records owing to his unworthy conduct.

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[51] *Harshacharita*, p.200 (Nirnaya Sagar Press ed.); Mookerji, R.K., *The Gupta Empire*, p.64.

[52] Elliot and Dowson, *History of India as Told by Its Own Historians*, I, pp.110ff.

[53] *Ibid*.

In recent decades, copper coins bearing the name of Rāmagupta, discovered from the Vidiśā-Airikiṇa region,[64] have thrown new light on the problem. The script of the legends and the famous *Garuḍa* symbol on them suggest that the Rāmagupta of these coins flourished in the Gupta age and belonged to the imperial house of the Guptas. The discovery of three Durjanpur inscriptions from Vidiśā region has finally removed all possible doubts entertained by historians about the historicity of Rāmagupta. The inscriptions[65] inscribed on Jaina images[66] reveal that they were built by Mahārājādhirāja Rāmagupta.

Thus, the literary tradition, corroborated by numismatic and epigraphic evidences, leads one to believe that Rāmagupta was a historical figure, a prince of the imperial Gupta family, who ruled for a very short period before the reign of Chandragupta II. It seems that Chandragupta II, the ambitious prince, opposed the kingship of Rāmagupta. He not only killed his elder brother but also married the widowed queen Dhruvadevī and occupied the imperial throne. The word *tatparigṛhīta* (accepted by him i.e. by Samudragupta) in the Gupta records for Chandragupta II is obviously used to emphasize that he was chosen by Samudragupta from amongst his many sons to succeed him—an effort to camouflage the truth.

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[54] Smith, V.A., *EHI*, p.301.

[55] *PHAI*, p.553, n.2.

[56] Basak, R.G., *HNEI*, Intro., p.iii.

[57] Majumdar, R.C., *NHIP*, Vol.VI,p.161.

[58] *JBORS*, XIV, pp.323ff.; XV, pp.134ff.

[59] Banerji, R.D., *op.cit.*, pp.26ff.

[60] Mirashi, *IHQ*, X, p.48; *IA*, LXII, p.201.

[61] Saletore, *op.cit.*, pp.14ff.

[62] Jayaswal, K.P., *JBORS*, XVIII, pp.17ff.

[63] Heras, *JBRS*, XXXIV, pp.19ff.

[64] Gupta, P.L., *JNSI*, XII, pp.130ff.; Trivedi, H.V., *JNSI*, pp.128ff.; Bajpai, K.D., *JNSI*, XVIII, pp.108-09. See also *JNSI*, XXIII, pp.340ff., cited by S.R. Goyal, *HIG*, p.226, n.3.

[65] Sircar, D.C., *JAIH*, 3, pp.146-51. See P.L. Gupta, *op.cit.*, p.283.

[66] The images are preserved in the Vidiśā Museum.

V

The assumption that Kumāragupta I succeeded his father Chandragupta II peacefully is not accepted by all. Some scholars suggest that Kumāragupta I was not the immediate successor of Chandragupta II[67] and Govindagupta, a brother of Kumāragupta I ruled for some time in between Chandragupta II and Kumāragupta I.

A clay seal of Dhruvasvāminī found from Vaiśālī reveals that Govindagupta was one of the sons of Chandragupta II born of Dhruvadevī. D.R. Bhandarkar,[68] while commenting on the seal, observed that in a seal of a queen one expects only the names of her ruling husband and that of the heir-apparent. Therefore, it may well be presumed that by the time the seal was prepared Kumāragupta was not declared the heir-apparent, otherwise his name should have occurred on it. Therefore, it may be surmised that Govindagupta was the eldest son of Chandragupta II and hence his heir-apparent.[69]

However, several scholars do not subscribe to this view.[70] On the basis of the genealogy given in the Gutpa epigraphs it has been maintained that Kumāragupta I succeeded his father as is evident from the word *tatpādānudhyāta* which was used in the epigraphs to denote the succession from father to son. But this argument is not tenable. As we know, the word *tatpādānudhyāta* has also been used in an inscription of a Sanakānīka Mahārāja, a feudatory of Chandragupta II to indicate their sovereign-vassal relationship.[71] Therefore, the use of this word for Kumāragupta does not indicate that he either immediately succeeded Chandragupta II, or that the latter's choice had fallen on the former. There are inscriptional evidences testifying to the fact that a person who succeeded his elder brother to the throne used the word *tatpādānudhyāta* for himself in relation to his father ignoring the name of his brother, the immediate successor of his father. Madanapāla, for example, did not succeed his father Rāmapāladeva and yet he has been called in one of the inscriptions 'Rāmapāladeva pādānudhyāta'.[72]

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[67] Gupta, P.L. *op.cit.*, pp.297ff.

[68] *Indian Culture*, XI, p.231.

[69] Gupta, P.L. *op.cit.*, 297; Jagannath, *IHQ*, XVII, pp.286ff. According to H.C. Raychaudhuri Govindagupta was a rival of Kumāragupta I (*PHAI*, p.565, n.1). R.K. Chaudhuri is of the view that Govindagupta was an imperial suzerain (*PIHC*, 1960, pp.50ff.).

[70] Banerji, R.D., *op.cit.*, p.51; Dandekar, *A History of the Guptas*, p.120; Majumdar, R.C., *NHIP*, p.174; Goyal, S.R., *op.cit.*, pp.254, 255.

[71] Fleet, *Corpus*, III, p.25.

[72] *JASB*, 69, p.65.

That Govindagupta did ascend the throne and ruled for sometime is supposed on the basis of an inscription of the Mālava year 524 (467 A.D.) found from Mandsaur.[73] It was issued by Dattabhaṭa, son of Govindagupta's general Vāyurakshita. According to this inscription, the vassal kings touched the feet of Govindagupta by their heads and Vibudhādhipa (Indra) had become suspicious of the power of Govindagupta. But, as D.C. Sircar points out, examples are not wanting where a subordinate ruler enjoyed the allegiance of smaller feudatories[74] and, therefore, no importance should be given to the above portion of the Mandsaur inscription. It has also been suggested that the association of Govindagupta with Malwa cannot be proved in the absence of any reliable evidence.[75]

It seems quite probable that Govindagupta was heir-apparent (*yuvarāja*) during the reign of Chandragupta II. P.L. Gupta[76] has drawn the attention of scholars to the statement of Paramārtha (sixth cent.) in the *Vasubandhucharita.* According to Paramārtha Vikramāditya, the king of Ayodhyā, became the patron of Buddhism under the influence of Vasubandhu. The king sent his queen and the heir-apparent Bālāditya to Vasubandhu to receive his teachings. Bālāditya invited Vasubandhu to Ayodhyā and honoured him when he ascended the throne. The elder patron of Vasubandhu was probably Chandragupta II Vikramāditya.[77] His son Bālāditya may, therefore, be identified with Govindagupta, as his second son Kumāragupta is known as Mahendrāditya. In the light of the statement of Paramārtha we feel that Govindagupta who was a *yuvarāja* during the reign of Chandragupta II, succeeded his father. His rule must have been of a very short duration, not more than two years in between 412 to 415 A.D. He was probably dethroned by his younger brother Kumāragupta I and was killed in the succession dispute that preceded the accession of the latter.[78]

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[73] *EI*, XXVII, p.12.

[74] *IHQ*, XXIV, pp.72ff.

[75] Gupta, P.L., *op.cit.*, p.298, 99. S.R. Goyal (*op.cit.*, p.255) is of the view that Govindagupta ruled first at Vaiśālī (probably as a governor) and later on in Western Malwa. A certain Bhāgavata Govinda mentioned in a Devagadh inscription has been identified by V.S. Agrawala with Govindagupta, the son of Chandragupta II (*Studies in Indian Art*, p.224f.).

[76] Gupta, P.L., *op.cit.*, p.300.

[77] Shastri, H.P., *JASB*, I, p.254; Bhandarkar, D.R., *IA*, 41, pp.1ff.; Gupta. P.L., *op. cit.*, p.136.

VI

The problem of succession after the reign of Kumāragupta I has been a matter of prolonged controversy. From the Bhitari pillar inscription[79] of Skandagupta it seems that he was the son and successor of Kumāragupta I. But according to a Bhitari seal of another Kumāragupta,[80] Purugupta was the son and successor of Kumāragupta I. The earliest known date of Skandagupta recorded in the Junagarh inscription is 455 A.D. which coincides with the supposed last known date of Kumāragupta I.[81] The known dates of Skandagupta range from 455 to 467 A.D.[82] According to Hoernle,[83] Bhandarkar[84] and Krishna Deva,[85] Skandagupta and Purugupta were identical. In the absence of any evidence this opinion is not tenable.

It is difficult to identify all the rivals of Skandagupta who coveted the Gupta throne, but Purugupta was undoubtedly one of them. He has been described as *Mahārājādhirāja* in the Bhitari seal indicating that he claimed imperial status and was one of the claimants to the throne. Cunningham held that Skandagupta was the eldest son of Kumāragupta and had a constitutional right to succeed him.[86] But doubts have been cast on the legitimacy of Skandagupta's claim to the sovereignty of the Guptas. It has been argued that after the death of Kumāragupta I there was a war of succession in which Skandagupta succeeded in defeating his brothers including Purugupta, the rightful claimant.[87] It has further been suggested that the omission of the name of the mother of

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[78] According to Jagannath Agrawal, Govindagupta was dethroned by Kumāragupta violently, for in the Tumain inscription of 435 A.D. the latter is described as protecting the earth like a good wife whom he seized by force (*IHQ*, XXII, p.289, cited by S.R. Goyal in *HIG*, p.254). See also P.L. Gupta, *op.cit.*, p.300.

[79] Fleet, *Corpus*, III, pp.52ff.

[80] *JASB*, LVIII, Pt. I, p.84; *SI*, pp.321, 22.

[81] The last known date of Kumāragupta I found on one of his silver coins is 136 G.E. (*BMC, GD*, p.XLIV; *IA*, 1902, p.266).

[82] Mookerji, R.K., *op.cit.*, p.90.

[83] *JRAS*, Pt. I, p.129.

[84] *IC*, IX, pp.231ff.

[85] *EI*, XXVI, Pt.V. pp.235ff.

[86] Cunningham, A., *Coins of Mediaeval India*, p.11.

[87] *JASB*, 1921, NS,XVII, pp.253ff. (cited by H.C. Raychaudhuri, *op.cit.*, p.572).

[88] *PHAI*, p.572.

Skandagupta in the genealogy given in the Bhitari stone pillar inscription indicates that she was not the Mahādevī (Chief-Queen) and Skandagupta had no natural claim to the throne.[88] But the omission of the name of Skandagupta's mother should not be made a ground to speculate about the legitimacy of his claim to the throne of the Guptas, for sometimes the names of the mothers of the kings were omitted in the genealogies.[89]

It has been the normal practice of the Gupta emperors to mention in the genealogical portion of their records the names of their mother and father. Nowhere in the available records of Skandagupta is the name of his mother is mentioned.[90] Probably, the omission has been deliberately made because Skandagupta was not the son of the Chief-Queen.[91] The Bhitari inscription has ignored the traditional pattern of recording the genealogy of the ruling king. Such a significant change can hardly be overlooked.

Though there is no evidence at our disposal referring directly to either fracticidal war or any war of succession that might have taken place immediately after the death of Kumāragupta I, such a possibility is indicated in the Junagarh inscription of Skandagupta. According to this inscription, "the goddess of fortune and splendour of her accord selected (Skanda) as her husband...having discarded all the other sons of the king as not coming upto her standard."[92] From this it appears that Skandagupta was not the legal claimant to the throne. But, as we know, besides many other factors the will of the sovereign ruler played an important role in the appointment of a successor. The Gupta rulers probably had little regard for the law of primogeniture as is evident from the case of Samudragupta who was appointed heir-apparent by Chandragupta I overlooking the claims of the other princes of equal birth. It is, therefore, quite likely that Kumāragupta I chose Skandagupta as his successor. According to the *Kathāsaritsāgara*, king Mahendrāditya chose his son Vikramāditya, the conqueror of the

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[89] *Ibid.*, p.573.

[90] Raychaudhuri, H.C. (*op.cit.*, p.570) is, however, of the opinion that the name of Skandagupta's mother was Devakī.

[91] Gupta, P.L., *op.cit.*, pp.318 ff. A.L. Basham (*BOAS*, XLVII, pp. 368, 69) has observed on the basis of a line of Bhitari pillar inscription that Skandagupta was not the son of a queen. But such an assumption cannot be accepted, for if Skandagupta was the son of a concubine he would not have made such an information public in his own record.

[92] *Corpus*, III, p.62. S.R. Goyal (*op.cit.*, pp.264-65) observes that these lines indicate towards the struggle for power that followed the death of Kumāragupta I.

Mlechchhas as his successor, and himself retired to Vārāṇasī.[93] It has been rightly suggested that his Mahendrāditya is no other than Kumāragupta I Mahendrāditya. His son Vikramāditya may, therefore, be easily identified with Skandagupta Vikramāditya, who is described as the conqueror of the Mlechchhas in the Junagarh inscription. The same tradition is echoed although in a confused form in a Buddhist work *Chandragarbhaparipṛchchhā* according to which king Mahendrasena, identified by K.P. Jayaswal with Kumāragupta Mahendrāditya, crowned his son Duḥprasahahasta, the conqueror of the Yavanas, Palhikas and Śakunas, as his successor and himself retired to lead a religious life.[94] Probably, the *Apratigha* type of coins of Kumāragupta I, on the obverse of which he is shown in monkish dress with two figures entreating him with some request (one of them is depicted in *vitarka mudrā*[95]) probably also indicates that Kumāragupta I became a monk in his last days. Therefore, as S.R. Goyal maintains, the combined testimony of all these sources may be taken to mean that towards the end of his reign Kumāragupta renounced the throne in favour of his son who was the conqueror of the Mlechchhas and was probably known as Vikramāditya, apparently Skandagupta Vikramāditya.

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[93] Tawney (Penzer), IX, pp.1 ff. At one place the *ĀMMK* gives the following list of the Gupta kings—Samudra, Vikrama, Mahendra and Sakārākhya *alias* Devarāja.

[94] *IHI*, pp.36 ff.

[95] *CGE*, pp.207 ff.

9

The Purāṇic King Pramati: Some Reflections*

Ajay Mitra Shastri

Scholars are generally in agreement on the point that the *Vaṁśānucharita* section of the Purāṇas affords rich evidence on ancient Indian history, and, with the textual corruptions quite natural to creep in the process of copying and re-copying rectified, it may provide quite dependable data for historical reconstruction. While there is absolutely no doubt about their valuable contributions upto the Āndhra-Sātavāhana period, even as regards the history of the Imperial Guptas, they provide highly important information. It was and is commonly admitted that a stanza encountered in some of the Purāṇas contains information regarding the extent of the kingdom of the early members of the Gupta dynasty.[1] It is now realised that a few stanzas met with in some of them supply indispensable data concerning the reigns of some of the later members of the dynasty as well.[2]

In addition, the Purāṇas contain some episodes which are reasonably supposed to reflect fairly dependably some important historical events of various periods. Concerning the Gupta history also, certain events are often taken to be the basis of a few Purāṇic episodes. One such episode relates to king Pramati.[3] Descriptions of the achievements of Pramati are met with in at least four Purāṇa texts: *Matsya*,[4] *Vāyu*,[5] *Brahmāṇḍa*[6] and *Liṅga*.[7] The *Matsya* version was the first to receive historians' attention. Vasudeva Sharan Agrawala, who noticed it for the first time, felt inclined to identify king Pramati of the *Matsya Purāṇa* with the famous Gupta emperor Chandragupta II Vikramāditya.[8] According to him, the stanzas in question describing the exploits of Pramati contain a 'very precise and explicit reference to the achievements of Chandragupta Vikramāditya described under the pseudonym of Pramati'.[9] In these pages this theory is proposed to be examined at some length.

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* This is a thoroughly revised and updated version of the author's papers originally published in the *Nagpur University Journal*, Vols. XVI (pp.150-57) and XVIII (pp.140-44) in mid-sixties. But they did not receive the attention they deserved. These have not been noticed in some of the latest works on the Gupta history only because they were published in a rather obscure periodical, while, as will be seen in the sequel, one of the scholars criticised our views on the subject merely on the basis of the summary of one of the papers published in the summaries of papers to be presented at one of the sessions of All-India Oriental Conference. In the present paper the evidence of the *Vāyu*, *Brahmāṇḍa* and *Liṅga Purāṇas* has also been noticed in addition to that of the *Matsya* examined in the original papers.

[1] For the latest discussion of this passage, see Goyal, S.R., *A History of the Imperial Guptas*, Allahabad, 1967, pp.50-53; *Gupta Sāmrājya kā Itihāsa*, Meerut, 1987, pp.64-67; Gupta, P.L., *Gupta Sāmrājya*, Varanasi, 1970, pp.102-03; *The Gupta Empire*, Varanasi, 1974, pp.115ff.

[2] Gupta, P.L., *Gupta Sāmrājya*, pp.102-03; *Gupta Empire*, i, ppl15ff..

The description of king Pramati as found in the *Matsya Purāṇa* may be summarised as follows:

At the time of the transitional phase (*sandhyā*) of the Kali age in the Svāyambhuva Manvantara there lived a king named Pramati, son of Chandramas and belonging to the Chandramas *gotra* and the lineage of Bhṛgu. For a period of full thirty years he marched upon the earth with strong elephantry, cavalry and chariot-borne forces. He himself carried weapons and was accompanied by hundreds and thousands of Brāhmaṇas wielding weapons. He annihilated all the Mlechchhas and Śūdra kings. In the course of his victorious campaigns he subdued all the rulers of the North, Madhyadeśa, mountainous regions, East, West, the Vindhyan region, Aparānta (North Koṅkaṇa), South, Draviḍa, Siṁhala, (Ceylon), Gandhāra, Pārada,[10] Pahlavas, Yavanas, Śakas, Tushāras, Barbaras, Śvetas, Halikas[11] (or Śveta-Halikas, perhaps an error for Śveta-Hūṇas or the White Huns), Daradas, Khaśas, Lampākas, Andhras and the Choras, and had thereby, become a universal (*chakravartin*) emperor. He destroyed all the heterodox systems (*pāshaṇḍas*) and irreligious people and was particularly known as the annihilator of the Śūdras. He was actually Vishṇu in the former birth and was born in the lineage of Mānava, the god among men (*nṛi-deva*). His army along with himself attained grand success in the Gaṅgā-Yamunā Doab.[12]

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[3] In some manuscripts of the *Liṅga Purāṇa* he is called Pramiti; it is clearly an error due to copyists.

[4] Hari Narayan Apte's edition, Anandashram Sanskrit Series, No.54, Pune, 1907, Ch.CILIV, verses 50-63.

[5] Ed. by Hari Narayan Apte, Anandashram Sanskrit Series, Pune, Ch. LVIII, verses 75-90.

[6] Venkateshwar Press (Bombay) edition, II (Anushaṅga-pāda), Ch.XXXI, verses 75-91.

[7] Venkateshwar Press (Bombay) edition, Ch. XL, verses 50-63a.

[8] Agrawala, V.S., *Matsya Purāṇa—A Study*, All India Kashiraja Trust, Varanasi, 1963, pp.228-31, 388; 'Kamboja Janapada', *Purāṇam*, VI, No.1, January, 1964, p.229.

[9] *Matsya Purāṇa—A Study*, p.388.

[10] For the evidence about the Pāradas, see Mukherjee, B.N., *The Pāradas*, Calcutta, 1972.

[11] The term Halika may also denote the people inhabiting the Hala mountain of the lower Indus Valley that ran between Baluchistan and Sind. See Chaudhury, S.B., *Ethnic Settlements in Ancient India*, pp.138-39, n.3.

When V.S. Agrawala wrote on the problem and I offered my comments on his position originally over two decades ago, only the *Matsya Purāṇa* description of the attainments of king Pramati was known. But thereafter, references to him in some other Purāṇas also came to light. At least three other Purāṇas are now known to contain accounts of the exploits of Pramati. Of these, the *Vāyu*[13] and the *Brahmāṇḍa*[14] *Purāṇas* afford detailed descriptions of Pramati's achievements similar to that of the *Matsya* with only slight differences of details. They may be regarded as belonging to a common tradition with a few, sometimes very important, alterations of which, at least, may owe their origin to the peculiar copying tradition of the Purāṇas. To mention only some very important variations leaving aside even apparently major verbal differences which often result into a change in the meaning and which may be actually only differences of readings, we may refer to some really material differences. For this purpose, only for comparison, we may take the *Matsya* version as the base only because it came to be noticed first and compare the *Vāyu* and *Brahmāṇḍa* versions with it. We have already summarised the *Matsya* version and only points of difference may be highlighted. In the list of peoples defeated by Pramati the *Vāyu Purāṇa* drops the Śakas and substitutes the Chīnas and the Śūlikas for the Śvetas and the Halikas (or Śveta-Halikas), the Ketas and the Kirātas for the Andhras and the Choras and the Mlechchhas for the Śūdras as annihilated by him.[15] Pramati is further described as born from the particles of Mādhava and as simply god (*deva*) instead of being born in the lineage of Mānava and as god among men. Moreover, Pramati is *twice* said to have been Chandramas by *gotra* and not at all as the son of Chandramas.[16] And finally, we find

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[12] *Evaṁ sandhy-āṁśake kāle saṁprāpte tu yugāntike/*
Teshām adharmiṇāṁ śāśtā Bhṛguṇāṁ cha kule sthitaḥ//
Gotreṇa vai Chandramaso nāmnā Pramtir=uchyate/
Kali-sandhyāṁśa-bhageshu Manoḥ Svāyambhuve=ntare/
Samas=triṁśat tu saṁpurṇāḥ paryaṭan vai vasundharām/
Aśvakarmā sa vai senāṁ hasty-aśva-ratha-saṅkulām//
Pragṛhīt-āyudhair=Vipraiḥ sātaś=otha sahasraśaḥ/
Sa tadā vai parivṛto Mlechchhān sarvān nijaghnivān//
Sa hatvā sarvaśaś chaiva rājānaḥ Śūdra-yonayaḥ/
Pāshaṇḍān sa sadā sarvān niḥśeshān=akarot prabhuḥ/
Adhārmikāś=cha ye kechit tān sarvān hanti sarvaśaḥ/
Udīchyān Madhyadeśāṁś=cha Pārvatīyāṁs=tath-aiva cha//
Prāchyān pratīchyāṁś=cha tathā Vindhyapṛshṭh-Āparāntikān/
Tath-aiva dākshiṇātyaṁś=cha Draviḍān Siṁhalaiḥ saha//
Gāndhārān Pāradāṁś=ch-aiva Pahlavān Yavanāñ=Chhakān/
Tushārān Barbarāñ=Chhvetān Halikān Daradān Khasān/
Lampākān=Andhrakāṁś=ch-āpi Chora-jātīṁs=tath-aiva cha/
Pravṛtta-chakro balavāñ=Chhūdrāṇām=anta-kṛd=babhau//
Vidrāvya sarva-bhūtāni chachāra vasudhām=imām/
Mānavasya tu vaṁśe tu nṛ-devasy-eha jajñivān//
Pūrva-janmani Vishṇuś=cha Pramatir=nāma vīryavān/
Sutaḥ sa vai Chandramasaḥ pūrve Kali-yuge prabhuḥ//
Dvātriṁśe=bhyudite varshe prakrānto viṁśatiḥ samāḥ/
Nijaghne sarva-bhūtani mānushāṇy-eva sarvaśaḥ//
Kṛtvā bīj-āvaśishṭaṁ tāṁ pṛthvīṁ krūreṇa karmaṇā/
Paraspara-nimittena kālen-ākasmikena cha//
saṁsthitā sahasā yā tu senā Pramatinā saha/
Gaṅgā-Yamunayor=madhye siddhiṁ prāptā samādhinā//

—*Matsya Purāṇa*, CXLIV.50-63.

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[13] *Evaṁ sandhy-āṁsāke kāle saṁprāpte tu yug-āntike/*
Teshāṁ śāstā hy-asādhūnāṁ Bhṛgūṇaṁ nidhan-otthitaḥ//
Gotreṇa vai Chandramaso nāmnā Pramatir=uchyate/
Mādhvasya tu so=ṁśena pūrvaṁ Svāyambhuve=ntare//
Samāḥ sa viṁśatiṁ pūrṇāḥ paryaṭan vai vasundharām/
Āchakarsha sa vai senāṁ sa-vāji-ratha-kuñjarām//
Pragṛhīt-āyudhair=Vipraiḥ śataśo=tha sahasraśaḥ/
Sa tadā taih parivṛto Mlechchhān hanti sahasraśaḥ//
Sa hatvā sarvagaś=chaiva rājñas=tān Śūdra-yonijān/
Pāshaṇḍān sa tataḥ sarvān niḥśeshān kṛtavān prabhuḥ//
N-āty-arthaṁ dhārmikā ye cha tān sarvān hanti sarvaśaḥ/
Varṇa-vyatyāsa-jātāṁś-cha ye cha tān=upajīvinaḥ//
Udīchyān Mahdyadeśāṁś=cha Pārvatīyaṁs=tath-aiva cha/
Prāchyān Pratīchyāṁś=cha tathā Vindhya-pṛshṭh-Āparāntikān//
Tath-aiva Dākshiṇātyāṁś=cha Draviḍān Siṁhalaiḥ saha/
Gāndhārān Pāradāṁś=ch-aiva Pahlavān Yavanāṁs-tathā/
Tushārān Barbarāṁś=Chīnān Śūlikān Daradān Khaśān/
Lampākān=atha Keṭāṁś=cha Kirātānāṁ cha jātayaḥ//
Pravṛtta-chakro balavān Mlechchhānām=antakṛd=vibhuḥ/
Adhṛshyaḥ sarva-bhūtānāṁ chachār-ātha vasundharām//
Mādhavasya tu so=ṁśena devasya hi vijajñivān/
Pūrva-janma-vidhi-jñaiś=cha Pramatir=nāma vīryavān//
Gotreṇa vai Chandramasaḥ pūrve Kali-yuge prabhuḥ/
Dvātriṁse=bhyudite varshe prakrānte viṁśatiḥ samāḥ//
Vinighnan sarva-bhūtāni Mānavāni sahasraśaḥ/
Kṛtvā vīry-āvaśeshāṁ tu pṛthvīṁ rūḍheṇa karmaṇā//
Paraspara-nimittena kopen-ākasmikena tu//
Sa sādhayitvā vṛshalān prāyaśas=tān=adhārmikān/
Gaṅgā-Yamunāyor=madhye nishṭhāṁ prāptaḥ sah-ānugaḥ//
—*Vayu Purāṇa*, LVIII.75-88

[14] *Evaṁ sandhy-āṁśake kāle saṁprāpte tu yug-āntike//*
Teshāṁ śāstā hy-asādhūnāṁ Bhṛgūṇāṁ nidhan-otthitaḥ/
Gotreṇa vai Chandramaso nāmnā Pramatir=uchyate//
Mādhavasya tu so=ṁśena pūrvaṁ Svāyambhuve=ntare/
Samāḥ sa viṁśatiḥ pūrṇāḥ paryaṭan vai vasundharām//
Anukarshan sa vai senāṁ sa-vāji-ratha-kuṁjarām/
Pragṛhīt-āyudhair=vipraiḥ śataśo=tha sahasraśaḥ//
Sa tadā vai parivṛto Mlechchhān hanti sma sarvasaḥ/
Saha vā sarvaśaś=ch-aiva rājñas=tān=chChhudra-yonijān//
Pākhaṇḍāṁs=tu tataḥ sarvān nihśeshaṁ kṛtavān vibhuḥ/
N-āty-arthaṁ dhārmikā ye cha tān sarvan hanti sarvaśaḥ//
Varṇa-vyatyāsa-jātāś=cha ye cha tān=anujīvinaḥ/
Udīchyān Madhyadeśyāṁś=cha Parvatīyāṁs=tath-aiva cha//
Prāchyān Pratīchyāṁś=cha tathā Vindhyapṛshṭhacharān=api/
Tath-aiva dākshiṇātyāṁś=cha Draviḍān Siṁhalaiḥ saha//

Gāndhārān Pāradāṁś=ch-aiva Pahlavān Yavanān Śakān/
Tushārān Barbarāṁś=Chīnān Śūlikān Daradān Khaśān//
Lampākārān sa-Katakan Kirātānāṁ cha Jātayaḥ/
Pravṛtta-chakro balavān Mlechchhānām=anta-kṛt prabhuḥ//
Aḍrshṭaḥ sarva-bhūtānāṁ chachār-ātha vasundharām/
Mādhavasya tu so=ṁśena devasy=eha vijajñivān//
Pūrva-janmani vikhyātaḥ Pramatir-nāma vīryavān/
Gotrato vai Chandramasaḥ pūrve Kaliyuge prabhuḥ//
Dvātriṁśe=bhyudite varshe prakrānto viṁśatiḥ samāḥ/
Vinighnan sarva-bhūtāni mānavān eva sarvaśaḥ//
Kṛtvā bīj-āvaśeshāṁ tu pṛthvyāṁ krūreṇa karmaṇā/
Paraspara-nimittena kopen-ākasmikena tu//
Susādhayitvā Vṛshalān prāyaśas=tān=adhārmikān/
Gaṅgā-Yamunāyor=madhye nishṭhāṁ prāptaḥ sah-ānugaḥ//

—*Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, II.31. 75-91.

[15] The *Matsya Purāṇa* mentions the Śūdras twice and the Mlechchhas only once whereas the position is reversed in the two other Purāṇas. The phrase *Śūdrāṇām antakṛt* is replaced by *Mlechchhānām antakṛt* in the *Vāyu* and the *Brahmāṇḍa* as if the two names were synonymous which is not the correct position.

[16] Describing Pramati *twice* as of Chandramas *gotra* is an unnecessary duplication in the *Vāyu* and the *Brahmāṇḍa* which actually repeat the same statement in the same words twice. The *Matsya* tradition that Pramati was Chandramas by *gotra* and was the son of Chandramas appears much better.

the statement that Pramati had been on march for twenty and not thirty years as averred in the *Matsya*. Generally speaking, the *Brahmāṇḍa* version is closer to the *Vāyu* one than to the *Matsya*, both as regards details and phraseology. Therefore, it would do if we refer only to the sole point of difference from the *Vāyu* version omitting the points highlighted in connection with it. The Aparāntikas are omitted from the list of conquered peoples as against the *Matsya* and *Vāyu* versions which refer to them. In all other respects, both the *Vāyu* and the *Brahmāṇḍa* texts are almost identical.

The *Liṅga Purāṇa* contains a summary account of the achievements of Pramati without any specification of details of his conquest and only indicating in a general way his *digvijaya*.[17] But it is close to the *Vāyu* and the *Brahmāṇḍa* versions.

Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty is probably right in regarding the Purāṇic tradition about Pramati as one of the Kali Age heresies showing strong Gupta evidence undoubtedly tempered in the post-Gupta period.[18] In his opinion, the Pramati episode represents the third stage of the development of the Kali Age myths which began to be compiled in the Purāṇas about the beginning of the fourth century A.D. The first stage is represented by the general gloomy picture of the Kali Age, embroidered with more specific descriptions, datable to about the early fourth century A.D. followed shortly after by the insertion of passages referring to the incarnation of god Vishṇu as Kalki, for the extermination of the barbarians. In the next stage the role of Kalki is transferred to an actual king called Pramati (or Pramiti). According to him, the Pramati/Pramiti episode also passed through two distinct stages: first, of a general nature without any mention of the peoples and countries said to have been vanquished by him; second, containing a specific list of his military exploits.[19] The first type is represented by the general account of Pramati/Pramiti met with in the *Liṅga Purāṇa* while the more detailed treatment found in the *Matsya*[20] is taken to represent the second stage.[21] Had he been aware of the description in the *Vāyu* and *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇas*, we are sure he would have placed them also in the second stage. However, we do not find it possible to agree with him in this matter and are of the firm opinion that the summary account follows, does not precede, the detailed specific account. Thus, the *Liṅga Purāṇa* description must be dated later than the detailed account encountered in the other Purāṇas including the *Matsya, Vāyu* and *Brahmāṇḍa*. Notwithstanding the inherent impossibility of dating individual Purāṇas as a whole, due to the peculiar character of the transmission of the Purāṇic tradition resulting in the same account with certain differences of details and names, our view is in general agreement with the prevailing opinions about their general relative chronology. The *Matsya, Vāyu* and *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇas* are regarded as three of the early Purāṇas. P.V. Kane dates them in *circa* 300-600 A.D.[22] While R.C. Hazra is inclined to place the Smṛti material in the *Vāyu* and *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇas* from third to fifth century and that in the *Matsya Purāṇa* to sixth-seventh century with some portions being as late as 1000 A.D.[23] However, as stated above, it is impossible to fix even the rough dates of the individual Purāṇa texts as a whole and we have to exercise extreme caution in this matter. Such a need is highlighted by the fact that certain stanzas encountered in the *Vāyu Purāṇa* refer to the Gupta emperors Chandragupta II and Kumāragupta I by the transparent names Devarakshita and Guha respectively while they are not mentioned in the *Matsya Purāṇa* which closes its dynastic account with the Āndhra-Sātavāhanas. Thus, the *Matsya* takes us, historically speaking, upto about the first quarter of the third century A.D., whereas the *Vāyu* is familiar with the political events upto about the mid-fifth century. However, in the instant context also, though the *Matsya* tradition may be reasonably regarded as the earliest, it cannot be asserted that it is in all cases preferable to the *Vāyu* and *Brahmāṇḍa* texts which sometimes have preserved better readings. It will be apparent from a perusal of the concerned texts quoted in the footnotes that in spite of the commonness of the tradition and general similarity, sometimes amounting to identity, of the relevant verses, the *Matsya* version, generally speaking, stands alone. The *Vāyu* and *Brahmāṇḍa* versions, differ from the *Matsya* one and are quite close to the *Liṅga* which repeats all the stanzas with certain differences in respect of readings and without specifying the countries and peoples conquered by Pramati/Pramiti. Some readings in the *Matsya* account have been tampered with in subsequent times in the process of copying and re-copying and what we have is sometime unintelligible and inconsistent while the other Purāṇa texts have preserved better readings which should be accepted in such cases. For example, the *Vāyu* reading *Āchakarsha sa vai senāṁ sa-vāji-ratha-kuñjarām* (verse 77b) and the *Brahmāṇḍa* reading *Anukarshan sa vai senāṁ sa-vaji-ratha-kuñjarām* (verse 78a) are definitely preferable as they contain a verbal form which gives meaning to the stanza to the rather queer *Matsya* reading *Aśvakarmā sa vai senāṁ sa-vāji-ratha-saṅkulām* (verse 52b) which is not only bereft of the necessary verbal form but also unnecessarily repeats reference to the cavalry (*aśva* and *vāji*) while ignoring an important traditional limb of the army, *viz.*, elephantry, which is mentioned in the other two readings. *Aśvakarmā* was obviously an unintelligent corruption of the original *āchakarsha* or *anukarshan*, the *Brahmāṇḍa* version being met with in the *Liṅga* summary also. But in most cases the *Matsya* has preserved the original readings which have been corrupted in the other three Purāṇas. To cite only a few instances, the *Matsya* states, rightly probably, that Pramati was continously on march for full thirty years[24] and that he had already completed twenty years of this expeditious career in the thirty-second year of his reign.[25] These statements are quite intelligible as they would show indisputably that Pramati had a long reign lasting at least forty-two years. As against this, the *Vāyu, Brahmāṇḍa* and the *Liṅga* versions aver that he marched for twenty years[26] and that he had completed twenty years of military expeditions in the thirty-second years of his rule,[27] which fails to indicate the length of his reign. As will be seen in the sequel, the ascertainment of the duration of Pramati's rule is very crucial to his possible identification. The *Vāyu, Brahmāṇḍa* and the *Liṅga Purāṇas twice* state that Pramati was of the Chandramas *gotra*[28] which is an unnecessary repetition. As against this, the *Matsya* position that he was Chandramas by *gotra*[29] and a son of Chandramas[30] is definitely better and preferable, though somewhat strange. The *Matsya Purāṇa* avers that Pramati was born in the lineage of Mānava who was god among men.[31] It has been misunderstood by the other three Purāṇas. The *Vāyu* and *Brahmāṇḍa twice* state that Pramati was born from the particles of Mādhava.[32] The *Liṅga* finds itself in an unenviable position by repeating this statement only replacing Mānava for Mādhava,[33] apparently because the copyist was aware that the original reading happened to be Mānava. That the reading *Mādhava* was uncalled for and corrupt is clearly indicated by the explicit statement in the *Matsya*[34] and the *Liṅga*[35] that Pramati was Vishṇu in the former birth.

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[17] *Evaṁ sandhyāṁśake kāle samprāpte tu yug-āntike/*
Teshāṁ śāstā hy-asādhūnāṁ bhūtānāṁ nidhan-otthitaḥ//
Gotre=smin vai Chandramaso nāmnā Pramatir=uchyate/
Mānavasya tu so-ṁśena pūrvaṁ Svāyambhuve=ntare//
samāḥ sa viṁśatiḥ pūrṇā paryaṭan vai vasundharām/
Anukarshan sa vai senāṁ sa-vāji-ratha-kuñjarām//
Pragṛhīt-āyudhair=Vipraiḥ śataśo=tha sahasraśaḥ/
Sa tadā taiḥ parivṛto Mlechchhān hanti sahasraśaḥ//
Sa hatvā sarvaśaś=chaiva rājñas=tān=Śūdra-yonijān/
Pākhaṇḍāṁs=tu tataḥ sarvān niḥśesham kṛtavān prabhuḥ/
N-āty-arthaṁ dhārmikā ye cha tān sarvān hanti sarvataḥ/
Varṇa-vyatyāsa-jātāś=cha ye cha tān=anu jīvinaḥ//
Pravṛtta-chakro balavān Mlechchhānām=anta-kṛt sa tu/
Adhṛshyaḥ sarva-bhūtānāṁ chachār-ātha vasundharām//
Mānavasya tu so=ṁśena devasy-eha vijajñivān/
Pūrva-janmani Vishṇos=tu Pramatir=nāma vīryavān//
Gotrato vai Chandramasaḥ pūrṇe Kali-yuge prabhuḥ/
Dvātriṁśe=bhyudite varshe prakranto viṁśatiḥ samāḥ//
Vinighnan sarva-bhūtāni śataśo=tha sahasraśaḥ/
Kṛtvā bīj-āvaśeshāṁ tu pṛthvīṁ krūreṇa karmaṇā//
Paraspara-nimittena kopen-ākasmikena tu/
Sa sādhayitvā Vṛshalān prāyaśas=tān=adhārmikān//
Gaṅgā-Yamunāyor=madhye sthitiṁ praptaḥ sah-ānugaḥ/
—*Liṅga Purāṇa*, XL. 50-61a.

[18] 'The Image of the Heretic in the Gupta Purāṇas', *Essays on Gupta Culture*, ed. by Bardwell L. Smith, Delhi, 1983, p.122.

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[19] *Ibid.*, p.124. Also see Pargiter, F.E., *The Purāṇa Text of the Dynasties of the Kali Age*, reprint, Varanasi, 1962, p.xiii.

[20] Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty was aware of these two accounts only.

[21] The *Vāyu* and *Brahmāṇḍa* accounts also fall in this category.

[22] See the chronological table given in the preliminary pages of Vols. II-V of his *History of Dharmaśāstra*.

[23] *Studies in the Purāṇic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs*, Dacca, 1940, Chs. II-IV; also pp. 174-89 where a chronological chart of the Smṛti-chapters of the Purāṇas is given. It must be remembered, however, that Hazra has dealt with the chronology of the Dharmaśāstra material alone and his views cannot be taken to be applicable to the entire Purāṇas.

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[24] *Samās=triśat tu sampūrṇāḥ paryaṭan vai vasundharām*/ verse 52a.

[25] *Dvā-triṁśe=bhyudite varshe prakrānto viṁśatiḥ samāḥ*/ verse 61a.

[26] *Samāḥ sa viṁśatiḥ pūrṇāh paryaṭan vai vasundharām* /*Vāyu*, verse 77a; *Brahmāṇḍa*, verse 77b; *Liṅga* verse 52a.

[27] *Dvā-triṁśe=bhyudite varshe prakranto viṁśatiḥ samāḥ*/*Brahmāṇḍa*, verse 87a; *Liṅga*, verse 58b. The *Vāyu* has *viṁśatim* instead of *viṁsatiḥ* of the *Brahmāṇḍa* and *Liṅga Purāṇas*.

[28] *Vāyu*, verses 76 and 86; *Brahmāṇḍa*, verses 76 and 86; *Liṅga*, verses 51 and 58. In the second place we have in the *Matsya sutaḥ sa vai Chandramasaḥ*.

[29] Verse 52.

[30] Verse 60.

[31] *Mānavasya tu vaṁśe tu nṛdevasy-eha jajñivān*/verse 59b.

[32] Vāyu, verses 76 and 85; *Brahmāṇḍa*, verses 77 and 85.

[33] Verses 51 and 57.

[34] *Pūrva-janmani Vishṇuś=cha*, verse 60.

[35] *Pūrva-janmani Vishṇos=tu* of *Liṅga*, XL.57, has to be corrected to *Pūrva-janmani Vishṇuś=cha* or *pūrva-janmani Vishṇus=tu* to make it yield an intelligible sense.

The *Vāyu* (LVIII. 85) turns it, rather ridiculously, into *pūrva-janma-vidhijñaiś=cha Pramatr=nāma vīryavān*, which makes no intelligible sense, while the *Brahmāṇḍa* (II. 31.86) converts it into *Pūrva-janmani vikhyātaḥ Pramatir=nāma vīryavān* with a view to

The *Liṅga Purāṇa* erroneously states that Pramati arose from the Bhūtas[36] instead of the unanimous preferable position of the other Purāṇas that he hailed from the family of the Bhṛgus.[37] The *Vāyu Purāṇa* drops the Śakas after the Pahlavas and the Yavanas from the list of peoples defeated by Pramati according to the two other Purāṇas specifying the peoples and countries conquered by him; this must be treated as due to textual corruption which replaced *tathā* in place of *Śakān*.[38] The original reading *Lampākān=Andhrakāṁś=ch-āpi, ie,* 'the Lampākas and the Andhra(ka)s', of the *Matsya Purāṇa* (verse 58) has been corrupted into *Lampākārān sa Katakān, ie,* 'the Lampākāras together with the Katakas' (*ie,* Lampākāras and Katakas) in the *Brahmāṇḍa* (verse 84) and *Lampākān=athe Ketāṁś=cha, ie,* 'the Lampākas and the Ketas', in the *Vāyu Purāṇa* (verse 83), thereby creating unknown peoples called Katakas and Ketas. Likewise, the reading *Vindhyapṛshṭh-āparāntikān* of the *Matsya Purāṇa* (verse 56), which is retained in its original form in the *Vāyu Purāṇa* (verse 81), has been reduced to *Vindhyapṛshṭhacharān=api* (verse 82), thereby dropping reference to the Aparāntikas (people of Aparānta). Sometimes the names of the peoples have been altogether altered with completely different names being replaced for the original ones. Thus, the Śvetas and Halikas of the *Matsya Purāṇa* (verse 57) have been substituted by the Chīnas and Śūlikas respectively in the *Vāyu* (verse 83) and the *Brahmāṇḍa* (verse 83). The use of the terms *Śūdra* and *Mlechchha* in the three Purāṇas is also quite interesting: the *Matsya* uses *Mlechchha* only once (verses 53) and *Śūdra* twice (verses 54 and 58) clearly indicating that it understands them in different senses, while the *Vāyu* and *Brahmāṇḍa* reverse this position. *Vāyu* (verse 78 and 84) and *Brahmāṇḍa* (79 and 84) employ the word *Mlechchha* twice and *Śūdra* once in verse 79), showing that the two terms got confused with one another. The same is true of the *Liṅga* which uses the name *Mlechchha* twice (verses 53 and 56) and *Śūdra* once (verse 54).[39]

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yielding an intelligible meaning. But to say on the basis of this later amendation alone, ignoring the stronger evidence of the *Matsya* version followed in the *Liṅga*, that the intended meaning is that he was known as Pramati in the former life is rather queer and unacceptable.

[36] *Bhūtānāṁ nidhan-otthitaḥ, Liṅga,* XL. 50.

[37] *Bhṛgūṇām cha kule sthitaḥ, Matsya,* CXLIV. 50; *Bhṛgūṇām nidhan-otthitaḥ, Vayu,* LVIII.75; *Brahmāṇḍa,* II. 31.75.

[38] In literature and epigraphs Yavanas, Pahlavas and Śakas are generally mentioned together.

[39] *Vāyu* (LVII.88) and *Brahmāṇḍa* (II. 31.89) *Purāṇas* refer to Vṛshalas also among Pramati's conquests.

We have the reading *Chora-jātiṁs=tathaiva cha*, 'the tribes of the Choras, *ie*, Cholas', in the *Matsya Purāṇa* (CXLIV. 58) after the Andhras which is quite reasonable geographically. This has been altered into *Kirātānāṁ cha jātayaḥ, i.e.*, 'the tribes of the Kirātas', in the *Vāyu* (LVIII.83) and *Brahmāṇḍa* (II.31.84). This emendation is, like Kataka and Keta for the Andhras, not only highly incompatible geographically as it would look strange to run from the north to south (Andhras) and again from south to north (Kirātas). Moreover, the latter expression would be in the nominative plural whereas in keeping with the rest of the expressions as well as looking to the context we expect accusative plural.

We have tried to highlight only significant differences between the known versions of the Purāṇic episode of King Pramati ignoring merely verbal changes which are quite common in the Purāṇic literature not only in the instant case but practically everywhere else.

Notwithstanding its non-inclusion in the dynastic portion, it is not impossible that the episode conceals the reminiscences of some famous historical personage. While trying to locate the figure, we need not harbour under the impression that every detail narrated in it should be literally applicable; but at the same time we should ensure that its main features do apply by and large. Let us try to find out who this figure can be. As we have seen, V.S. Agrawala is insistent regarding the identity of Pramati with the Gupta emperor Chandragupta II Vikramāditya.[40] We propose to state his principal arguments and examine them with a view to see if the proposed identification can really stand.

I. NṚDEVA AND DEVA

It is known from some Vākāṭaka inscriptions,[41] the Sanchi inscription of Āmrakārdava[42] and legends on some of his gold coin-types[43] that Devagupta or Devarāja or Deva (śrī) was a name of endearment of Chandragupta II. Agrawala thinks that this name is comparable to the 'epithet' *Nṛdeva* used in the *Matsya* in connection with Pramati[44] who can, therefore, be equated with the Gupta emperor Chandragupta II. However, the word *nṛdeva* is employed in the *Purāṇa* not for king Pramati, but actually for Mānava in whose family the former is said to have been born. Moreover, the expression *nṛdeva* as used here is actually a descriptive adjective and not a proper name. It describes Mānava as a 'god among men' and thereby alludes to the ancient Indian theory attributing divinity to the king. In the *Vāyu* (LVIII.85) and the *Brahmāṇḍa* (II.31.85) the word *deva* is employed for Mādhava from whose particles Pramati is represented to have been born and consequently there also it has not been used as a name of Pramati and it has in the context the literal meaning of 'god'. In the *Liṅga* (XL.57) also it is used in the same sense but with reference to Mānava[45] from whose particles Pramati was born, and not for Pramati himself. This argument, thus, cannot lead us to any conclusion.

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[40] Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty ('The Image of the Heretic in the Gupta Purāṇas', *Essays on Gupta Culture*, edited by Bardwell L. Smith, pp.124-25) approvingly refers to Agrawala's view but does not cite any new argument in its support.

[41] Dudia pls. of Pravarasena II, *ll*.11-12 (Mirashi, V.V., *Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas, CII*, V, p.45); Tirodi pls. of Pravarasena II, l*l*.11-12 (*ibid*., p.50); Chammak pls. of Pravarasena II, *l*.15 (*ibid*., p.24); Mandhal pls. of Pravarasena II, *l*.15 (Shastri, Ajay Mitra, 'Mandhal Copper Plate Charter of Pravarasena II, Year 16', *EI*, XLI, p.74); Mandhal pls. of Pṛthivīsheṇa II, Years 2 and 10, *ll*.13-14 and 15 respectively (Shastri, Ajay Mitra, 'Mandhal pls. of Pṛthivīsheṇa II, Years 2 and 10', *EI*, XLI, pp.166 and 177); etc. Agrawala's statement that Prabhvātīguptā calls herself daughter of Devagupta (*Matsya Purāṇa—A Study*, p.229) is not correct as her two known plates, Pune and Rithpur pls., describe her as the daughter of Chandragupta, not Devagupta. See Mirashi, V.V., *Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas, CII*, V, pp.7 and 36 respectively.

II. REGNAL PERIOD

According to Agrawala, the *Matsya* mentions thirty-two years as Pramati's regnal period which was exactly that of Chandragupta II.[46] A critical analysis of the *Matsya* evidence, however, shows that Pramati actually ruled for a period of at least forty-two years. It is stated in verse 52 that Pramati was on march continuously for full thirty years, while verse 61 tells us that he had been marching for twenty years when he was in his thirty-second regnal year. Now, if Pramati was engaged in warfare for thirty years and if the twentieth year of his expeditions fell in the thirty-second year of his reign, he must have continued to rule for at least ten years thereafter. On the other hand the exact limits of the reign of Chandragupta II are unfortunately unknown. The earliest dated record of Chadragupta II's reign is the Mathurā pillar inscription of the (Gupta) year 61 (=380 A.D.).[47] The third line of this epigraph contained a reference to his regnal year also, but this part of the record is very badly damaged, particularly the first letter. D.R. Bhandarkar, who brought it to the notice of historians, preferred the reading *prathame* somewhat doubtfully,[48] thereby dating Chandragupta II's accession in 380 A.D., while D.C. Sircar took it to be *pañchame*[49] and accordingly dated Chandragupta II's accession in 376 A.D.[50] S.R. Goyal also prefers the reading *pañchame* and takes 376 A.D. as the date of his accession.[51] We must add that the facsimile acccompanying Bhandarkar's paper does not provide any clue in this matter and in the absence of any other evidence we may date the Gupta emperor's accession either in 376 or 380 A.D.[52] His last known date is the Gupta year 93 (=412-413 A.D.) when the Sanchi stone inscription recording Āmrakārdava's charity was put up.[53] Chandragupta II's reign must have come to a close by G.E. 96 (=415-416 A.D.), when we find his son Kumāragupta on the imperial throne.[54] Chandragupta II, thus, ruled for a period of about thirty-seven or thirty-three years, *i.e.* five or nine years less than the rule of Pramati recorded in the *Matsya Purāṇa*. As against this, the *Vāyu, Brahmāṇḍa* and *Liṅga Purāṇas*, as pointed out above, do not give us any clear idea of the length of his reign, though they all state that he had been on military expeditions for twenty years in the thirty-second year of his reign.

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[42] Fleet, J.F., *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings and their Successors, CII*, III, p.32, pp.7-8; Bhandarkar, D.R., Chhabra, B.Ch., and Gai, G.S., *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings, CII*, III, New Delhi, 1981, p.250, *ll.*7-8; Sircar, D.C., *Select Inscriptions bearing on Indian History and Civilization*, I, second edition, Calcutta, 1965, p.281.

[43] See Altekar, A.S., *Coinage of the Gupta Empire*, Varanasi, 1957: descriptions of his Archer, Lion-Slayer and Couch types on which we get the legend *Deva-śrī*.

[44] *Matsya Purāṇa—A Study*, p.229.

[45] There, however, it is a scribal error for Mādhava which is found in the *Vāyu* and *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇas*.

[46] *Matsya Purāṇa—A Study*, p.229.

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[47] Bhandarkar, D.R., 'Mathura Pillar Inscription of Chandragupta II, G.E. 61', *EI*, XXI, pp.1ff.

[48] *Ibid.*

[49] Sircar, D.C., *Select Inscriptions bearing on Indian History and Civilization*, I, p.277.

[50] R.C. Majumdar was uncertain about the date of Chandragupta II's accession wavering between these two dates but thought that 376 A.D. appeared to be more probable. See *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, III: *The Classical Age* (editors R.C. Majumdar and A.D. Pusalker), Bombay, 1954, p.18.

[51] *Guptakālina Abhilekha*, Meerut, 1984, p.100; *Gupta Sāmrājya kā Itihāsa*, Meerut, 1987, p.203.

[52] V.S. Agrawala apparently favours the reading *prathame* and dates Chandragupta II's accession in 380 A.D.

[53] Bhandarkar, D.R., Chhabra, B.Ch., and Gai, G.S., *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings, CII*, III, pp.247ff.

[54] *Ibid.*, pp.267ff. for Bilsad Stone Pillar inscription of Kumāragupta I, dated Gupta year 96.

III. DURATION OF MILITARY EXPEDITIONS

Agrawala would have us believe that Pramati was engaged in military expeditions for twenty years which agrees exactly with what we know of Chandragupta II who ascended the throne in 380 A.D. and had finished his *digvijaya* by 400 A.D.[55] This suggestion goes against the evidence of the *Matsya* itself which avers unequivocally that Pramati kept on fighting for thirty years and that the twentieth year of his military career fell in the thirty-second year of his rule. Secondly, the other Purāṇic versions of the episode also repeat this statement.[56] Thirdly, the date by which Chandragupta II's military operations had come to a successful completion does not still admit of a definite answer. The extensive series of Western Kashatrapa silver coins were earlier supposed to have ended abruptly sometime between 388 and 397 A.D.,[57] while the earliest date on Chandragupta II's own silver issues, which were apparently based on the silver currency of the Western Kshatrapas, falls somewhere between 409 A.D. and the close of his reign.[58] Even according to this position, we cannot aver that Chandragupta II's military career had come to a close by 400 A.D., as stated by Agrawala. But we now know that the latest Western Kshatrapa silver issues are dated as late as 415 A.D., well into the reign of Chandragupta II's son and successor, Kumāragupta I.[59]

IV. PATRONAGE OF VAISHṆAVISM

Agrawala's contention that Pramati's description as having been Vishṇu in his former birth may point to Chandragupta II's being a *paramabhāgavata*,[60] may well be conceded. Though Chandragupta II is the first Gupta emperor to be styled *Paramabhāgavata* in the official records of the Gupta dynasty, and the title was assumed by his successors as well, there is also no doubt that even Samudragupta, though not styled *Paramabhāgavata* formally, was also a staunch Vaishṇava, as is indicated by the presence of Garuḍa-*dhvaja* on his coins. His Prayāga *praśasti* provides strong evidence of his Bhāgavata inclination and the impact of the *Gītā*, the *Bible* of the Bhāgavata religion. Then again, in the Gupta and post-Gupta periods several other rulers also had strong Vaishṇavite leanings. It cannot, therefore, be averred that Chandragupta II alone could be described as Vishṇu in the previous birth.

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[55] *Matsya Purāṇa—A Study*, p.129.

[56] However, as stated above, they do not give any idea of the duration of his rule.

[57] On the coins of the last known Mahākshatrapa Svāmi-Rudrasiṁha IV (Svāmi-Rudrasiṁha III according to Rapson and some other scholars) the unit figure after those for 300 and 10 is not clear. See Rapson, E.J.,*BMC, AWAKTDBD*, pp.192-94.

[58] Majumdar, R.C., and Altekar, A.S., (editors), *A New History of the Indian People, VI: The Vākāṭaka-Gupta Age*, p.167. For the coins, see Altekar, A.S., *The Coinage of the Gupta Empire*, pp.153-54. These coins are dated in the Gupta era and the unit figure on them is not preserved so that we have on all these coins only 90*x*.

[59] We owe this valuable information to Shri Dilip Ṛajgor of Bombay.

[60] *Matsya Purāṇa—A Study*, p.229.

V. CONQUESTS

In Agrawala's opinion, the description of Pramati's conquests agrees with what • we know of Chandragutpa II's military achievements.[61] It is pertinent to note in this context that the account of Pramati's conquests, which included the well-known seven divisions of India, appears to be rather conventional than real. Even admitting the identification of King Chandra of the Meharauli Iron Pillar Inscription with Chandragupta II,[62] there is no evidence whatever that the Gupta emperor had anything to do with the southern people like the Andhras, Chora-jātis (an error for Chola-jātis) and the Ḍraviḍas. Madhyadeśa was already included in the extensive empire inherited by him in spite of the weakness and destabilisation caused by the short Rāmagupta interregnum and we are not aware of any rebellion there which may have necessitated its re-conquest. As for the North and North-West, the authors of the Purāṇic stanzas in question appear to have been anxious to refer to all the peoples of these regions they knew of without caring for the hard facts of history. By these conquests Pramati is said to have attained the status of a universal monarch or *chakravartin* (*pravṛtta-chakra*). This statement can in no way be taken to refer to the Chakravikrama type gold coin on the obverse of which Chandragupta II is represented as receiving a present (or presents) from the god Vishṇu depicted as Chakrapurusha,[63] as suggested by Agrawala.[64]

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[61] *Ibid.*, pp.xii, 228, 229.

[62] For a full discussion and summary of the various theories on the identification of king Chandra of the Meharauli pillar inscription, see, M.C. Joshi and S.K. Gupta (editors), *King Chandra and the Meharauli Pillar*, Meerut, 1989.

[63] For the Chakravikrama type coin, see Altekar, A.S., *Coinage of the Gupta Empire*, pp.145-50. Its true significance was first pointed out by V.S. Agrawala. *Vide JNSI*, XVI, pp.97-101.

[64] *Matsya Purāṇa—A Study*, p.230.

VI. VICTORY OVER ŚŪDRA KINGS

Agrawala is inclined to think that the description of Pramati as the exterminator of the Śūdra kings (*Śūdrāṇām antakṛt*) seems to be a reference to Chandragupta II's act of uprooting the Śaka Kshatrapas of Western India.[65] But this is not possible as both the *Matsya* and *Brahmāṇḍa* versions specifically refer to Śakas and there was no necessity to refer to them as Śūdras. Moreover, if the intention were to refer to the Śakas of Western India, it could have been met with by the reference to the Mlechchhas who are mentioned in all the three versions supplying detailed information about Pramati's conquests. And lastly, the Śaka Kshatrapas of Western India were not regarded as Śūdras and even conservative Brāhmaṇa kings of South India like the Sātavāhanas and Ikshavākus did not hesitate in establishing matrimonial relations with them.

VII. GAṄGĀ-YAMUNĀ DOAB

The statement that Pramati's army achieved its successful purpose in between the rivers Gaṅgā and Yamunā has been taken to refer to Chandragupta II as the Gaṅgā-Yamunā Doab or roughly speaking Madhyadeśa was the homeland of the Guptas.[66] However, it can, for that matter, be taken to allude to any early Gupta king not to speak of Chandragupta II in particular.

VIII-IX. ANCESTRY AND GOTRA

The *Matsya* mentions Chandramas as the name of Pramati's father,[67] whereas the name of Chandragupta II's father was Samudragupta. Agrawala accounts for this discrepancy by averring that Chandraprakāśa was another name of endearment for Samudragupta.[68] This is evidently based on Vāmana's *Kāvyālaṅkāra* (III.2.2), according to which, Chandraprakāśa, the son of Chandragupta, appointed Vasubandhu as his minister.[69] The identity of this Chandraprakāśa and his father Chandragupta, however, rests on the determination of the date of Vasubandhu about which there exists a wide divergence of opinion. While some scholars place him in the fourth century A.D.,[70] others are inclined to hold that he lived about one century later in the following century.[71] Special interest attaches in this connection to the statement contained in Paramārtha's biography of Vasubandhu that on becoming king, Bālāditya, the son and successor of Vikramāditya, king of Ayodhyā, invited Vasubandhu to his capital and accorded him warm patronage.[72] Now the only Bālāditya known to Gupta history is Narasiṁhagupta Bālāditya, the son of Purugupta. Allan, therefore, appears to be right when he proposes to identify Vikramāditya, the father of Bālāditya according to Paramārtha, with Purugupta.[73] And if Vasubandhu lived in the time of Bālāditya, Chandraprakāśa, Vasubandhu's patron according to Vāmana, cannot be identified with Samudragupta. Moreover, had Chandraprakāśa been one of the names of endearment of Samudragupta, we should naturally expect it to find place in his coin-legends, which is, however, not the case.[74]

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[65] *Ibid.*

[66] *Ibid.* For a full discussion of the problem of the original home of the Imperial Guptas and its location in Eastern Uttar Pradesh instead of Bengal and Magadha as suggested by some earlier scholars, see Goyal, S.R., *A History of the Imperial Guptas*, pp.41-52; Gupta, P.L., *Gupta Sāmrājya*, pp.229-31; Agrawal, Ashvini, *Rise and Fall of the Imperial Guptas*, Delhi, 1989, pp.79ff.

[67] The *Vāyu* and *Brahmāṇḍa* versions mention Chandramas only as Pramati's *gotra twice*. It is obvious that the second reference mentioned him as son of Chandramas *originally* but later it was corrupted as it was unintelligible how one could be of Chandramas *gotra* as well as son of a person named Chandramas.

[68] *Matsya Purāṇa—A Study*, p.230

According to the *Matsya*, Pramati was of the Chandramas *gotra*. Agrawala takes it to be a reference to the family of Chandragupta I by which each king was a 'Gupta'.[75] However, if the Guptas had derived their *gotra* (or dynastic name) from the name of the founder of tthe dynasty, it should have been Gupta, not Chandramas, for the family was put on the road to royalty by Gupta, not Chandragupta I who was the third member of the family. On the other hand it is known from the Poona plates of Prabhāvatīguptā[76] that the Guptas belonged to the Dhāraṇa *gotra*, which they had not taken from their priests as till recently believed[77] but was their own *gotra*.[78] Moreover, *Matsya*, *Vāyu*, *Brahmāṇḍa* and *Liṅga* versions are unanimous in stating that Pramati was born in the lineage of Bhṛgus, while no such claim is made on behalf of any Gupta ruler in any inscription.

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[69] *So=yaṁsamprati Chandragupta-tanayaḥ Chandraprakāśo yuvā/*
Jāto bhūpatir=āśrayaḥ kṛta-dhiyāṁ dishṭyā kṛtārthāśrayaḥ//

[70] M. Peri, Macdonell, S.C. Vidyabhushan and V.A. Smith assign him to the fourth century A.D. *Vide* Smith, V.A., *The Early History of India*, 4th ed., pp.346-47.

[71] Takakusu (*JRAS*, 1905, pp.45-53) thinks that Vasubandhu lived between 420 and 500 A.D. Almost the same view is held by John Allan who identifies Vikramāditya, the father of Bālāditya, who extended a special patronage to Vasubandhu, with Pūrugupta, son of Kumāragupta I. See Allan, *BMC, GD*, p.li.

[72] *JRAS*, 1905, pp.33ff.; *The Vākāṭaka-Gupta Age*, p.156n.

[73] Allan, *op.cit.*, p.li.

[74] Kācha, Samudragupta's name of endearment, Parākrama and Apratiratha, his *birudas*, are mentioned in his coin-legends. A much stronger claimant for the identification with Chandraprakāśa is Kumāragupta I Mahendrāditya who was the son of Chandragupta II and may have been popularly known as Chandra. In this connection attention may be drawn to some of his coin-legends which describe him as the 'moon on the surface of the earth' (*pṛthivī-tal-āmbara-śaśī*), 'the moon in the sky of the Gupta family' (*Gupta-kula-vyoma-śaśī*) or as the 'spotless moon of the Gupta family' (*Gupta-kul-āmala-chandra*).

[75] *Matsya Purāṇa—A Study*, p.230.

X. THE BRĀHMAṆA ARMY

The *Matsya*[79] reference to the Brāhmaṇa army of king Pramati points, according to Agrawala, to the Lichchhavi contingent in the Gupta army which appears to have begun being recruited from the time of Samudragupta and which formed its *maula* section. Agrawala opines that the Lichchhavis were known as Śarmaka-Varmaka, or what may be called Kshatra-Brāhmaṇas and their present descendants, known as *Bhūmihāra*, follow the profession of Kshatriyas but for all practical purposes adopt the social code of the Brāhmaṇas.[80] Unfortunately, Agrawala has not cited any evidence in support of his suggestions. Although, the close relationship between the Guptas and the Lichchhavis is a historical fact, there is nothing to suggest that there was a Lichchhavi contingent in the Gupta army or that the present-day Bhūmihāras have descended from the Lichchhavis. Indian tradition is unanimous in regarding the Lichchhavis as Kshatriyas,[81] and they could hardly be described as Brāhmaṇas.[82]

XI. SOME OTHER FACTS

Pramati is said to have destroyed all the *pāshaṇḍas* or non-Brāhmaṇical heterodox sects. This statement cannot be applied to

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[76] Mirashi, V.V., *Inscription of the Vākāṭakas*, *CII*, V, pp.7-8, *l*. 7.

[77] Sharma, Dasharatha, 'Some New Light from the Skanda-purāṇa on the Dhāraṇa Gotra of the Guptas', *Purāṇam*, VII, No.I (January 1965), pp.183-85.

[78] The *Skanda Purāṇa* (Brahmakhaṇḍa, 35-37) describes the pious Brāhmaṇas of various *gotras* including Dhāraṇa living in Dharmāraṇya. For a full discussion on the Guptas being Brāhmaṇas, see Goyal, S.R., *Gupta Sāmrājya kā Itihāsa*, pp.25-28.

[79] This reference is met with in the other three Purāṇas also.

[80] *Matsya Purāṇa—A Study*, pp.230-31.

[81] Raychaudhuri, H.C., *Political History of Ancient India*, 6th edition, pp.122-24.

[82] As would be shown in the sequel, the reference here is to predominantly Brāhmaṇa army.

Chandragupta II who is well-known for his religious catholicity. Himself a *parama-bhāgavata* (devout Vaishṇava), some of his high officials were Śaivas or Buddhists.[83] The flourishing condition of Buddhism during his reign is vouched for by the Chinese pilgrim Fa-hien, who visited India during his time.

The foregoing discussion would have made it amply clear that not a single statement about Pramati in the Purāṇas tallies with what we know about Chandragupta II Vikramāditya, and consquently the two cannot be identical.

Recently, S.N. Roy has criticised the above view on the basis of a summary of our paper and attempted to uphold the identification of king Pramati of the *Matsya Purāṇa* with Chandragupta II by drawing additional support from the *Vāyu* and *Brahmāṇḍa* versions.[84] We need not go into the details of all his arguments, some of which will be found answered above, but may refer only to some of them in brief. The references to the Siṁhalas and Draviḍas as defeated by Pramati has been taken too literally to mean that the Siṁhalas or Ceylonese had joined the Draviḍas for assisting them either as allies or mercenaries.[85] Such an excessive stress on grammar and literal interpretation is wholly unwarranted and would lead to disastrous historical conclusions, more specially when Purāṇas are concerned. Roy has wrongly attributed to us the statement that Pramati is stated to have ruled for forty years.[86] What we feel and reiterate on the basis of the *Matsya* tradition is that Pramati had a long reign of at least forty-two years, and this position has been clearly stated above in detail.

Next, as regards the name of the king, Roy says that it was a popular practise in the Gupta period for high dignitaries to assume more than one name[87] and it is not impossible that the Gupta emperor Chandragupta II also had 'a more high-sounding appellation after the name of the family in which he was born besides his general name.'[88] He also observes that one of the editions of the *Matsya* has *svataḥ* in place of *sutaḥ* which would refer to Chandragupta II himself and not to his father.[89] But here again the use of genitive with the name Chandramas would pose an insurmountable problem which would not exist with the reading *sutaḥ* which must have been the original, and the former (*svataḥ*) its later unintelligent corruption. And, as already pointed out, saying that Pramati was Chandramas by *gotra twice* as is done in the *Vāyu, Brahmāṇḍa* and *Liṅga Purāṇas* is an uncalled for repetition and in the second place it must have been replaced for the statement that he was son of Chandramas. Again, as shown earlier, *pūrva-janmani vikhyātaḥ Pramatir=nāma vīryavān* of the *Brahmāṇḍa* and *pūrva-janma-vidhi-jñaiś=cha Pramatir=nāma vīryavān* of the *Vāyu* are unwarranted distortions of *pūrvajanmani Vishṇuś=cha Pramatir=nāma vīryavān* of the *Matsya Purāṇa* which has become only slightly corrupted in the *Liṅga Purāṇa* as *Pūrva-janmani Vishṇos=tu Pramatir =nāmà vīryavān*, the original intention being to state that Pramati was Vishṇu in the former life, *i.e.* an incarnation of Vishṇu, which gives a good sense. What Roy wants to infer from the *Vāyu* and *Brahmāṇḍa* readings is not quite clear, but possibly it is that Pramati was his name in the former life. But such an interpretation is simply impossible, for, as both the Purāṇas clearly state in verse 76, they are describing the attainments of king Pramati *by name* (*nāmnā Pramatir=uchyate*) who belonged to the Chandramas *gotra* (*gotreṇa vai Chandramasaḥ*). Then again, if, for argument's sake, we were to accept that such was actually the case, we shall be landing ourselves in an awkward position of believing that he was called Pramati in the former as well as present life. But Roy does not stop just with it. He goes one step further and observes that 'The syntactical order of the verse also shows that the word *pūrve* or *pūrvaṁ* should not be dissociated from *gotrataḥ vai chandramasaḥ*; otherwise, the genitive ending of *chandramā* (sic) would be meaningless. What the *purāṇakāra* seems to convey is that the king's name had in the beginning (*pūrva*) the word Chandra'.[90] It is indeed a strange interpretation of the verse-half *gotrato vai chandramasaḥ pūrve Kali-yuge prabhuḥ* of the *Brahmāṇḍa* or of the same with the substitution of *gotreṇa* for *gotrato* in the *Vāyu*. Even leaving aside the impossibility and untenability of such an interpretation, it may be mentioned that it was not necessary to point it out in view of the absurdity involved in it, for, as is well known, *gupta* was only a family surname, Chandra alone being the king's personal name.

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[83] *Cf.* Udayagiri inscription recording the excavation of a Śaiva cave by Vīrasena alias Śāba (Fleet,*CII*, III, p.35) and the Sanchi epigraph registering Āmrakārdava's donations to a Buddhist establishment (*ibid*., p.29).

[84] *Historical and Cultural Studies in the Purāṇas*, Allahabad, 1978, pp.132-45.

[85] *Ibid*., pp.134-36. As evidences of Chandragupta II's contact with the Draviḍas Roy refers to Kadamba epigraphs recording matrimonial alliance with the Guptas, a large coin-find at Satara and references in Rāshṭrakūṭa inscriptions to him. But none of these references is connected with the Tamil-speaking people. Moreover, Satara has not actually yielded any hoard of silver coins of Kumāragupta I as generally believed. As pointed out by P.L. Gupta (*Gupta Sāmrājya*, p.92, fn.9), this error caused by the inadvertence of V.A. Smith (*JRAS*, 1889, p.124), has been repeated by later numismatists like Allan (*BMC, GD*, p.cxxx) and Altekar (*Coinage of the Gupta Empire*, p.217) and that the hoard was actually found at a place called Sanaud in the Ahmedabad District of Gujarat.

[86] *Op.cit*., p.136.

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[87] The example under reference is that of Chandragupta II's hereditary minister Vīrasena who had another name, *viz.* Śāba, known from an Udayagiri cave inscription (Bhandarkar, D.R., Chhabra, B.Ch., and Gai, G.S., *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings, CII*, III, pp.255-56). Roy misunderstands the wording of the stanza in question (*Kautsaś=Śāba iti khyāta Vīrasenaḥ kul-ākhyayā*, verse 4) to mean that he was called Śāba because of his connection with the sage Kutsa, and Vīrasena, which was his family-name (*op.cit.*, p.137). The verse actually states that Vīrasena was known as Śāba which was his *kulākhyā* (family-name) and belonged to the Kautsa *gotra*.

[88] *Ibid.*, p.138.

[89] *Ibid*. The reference is to the Venkatshwar Press edition. The reading there is *svataḥ sa vai chandramasaḥ* instead of *sutaḥ sa vai chandramasaḥ* of the Anandashram edition.

Roy's suggestion that 'the Purāṇic use of the term Pramati is essentially in the sense of an honorific, while the proper name of the king is the same as documented by other evidences', because it is only in the *Matsya* version that the king is specifically called Pramati in the context of his achieving success in the Gaṅgā-Yamunā Doab while the *Brahmāṇḍa* and *Vāyu* do not mention this name, is simply unintelligible.[91] His comparison of Pramati with the expression *prathita-pṛthu-mati* used in the Bhitari epigraph[92] is meaningless as in the instant case the former was a proper name while the latter forms a poetic description though of identical meaning. It would thus follow that no solid argument has been adduced in support of Pramati's identification with Chandragupta II Vikramāditya.

If the Purāṇic king Pramati cannot be identified with the Gupta emperor Chandragupta II Vikramāditya, is there any other Gupta emperor who can match Pramati? The only historical monarch who answers best the description of king Pramati in the Purāṇas is the mighty Gupta emperor Samudragupta. It must be remembered in this connection that none of the ancient Indian kings, not even Samudragupta, can fully answer the eulogistic account of Pramati and we should not expect it either. But much of the Purāṇic *praśasti* can be satisfactorily accounted for on the assumption that the author of the relevant portion of the Purāṇas had before him the eventful career of Samudragupta while narrating the achievements of the mythical king Pramati. In other words, the Purāṇas appear to have described the exploits of Samudragupta under the pseudonym of Pramati in a superbly exaggerated impressive form. It would be evident from the following discussion.

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[90] *Ibid.* The comparison of *Vāyu* and *Brahmāṇḍa* versions of the stanza in question with the expression *Chandrāhvena* in the Meharauli iron pillar inscription of king Chandra (*ibid.*, pp.138-39) is not quite apt and intelligible.

[91] *Ibid.*, pp.139-40. However, as pointed out earlier, the second stanza of this account clearly lays down that the description pertains to a king named Pramati and the reference to his success in the Gaṅgā-Yamunā Doab need not be looked in isolation.

[92] *Op.cit.*, p.139. For the inscription, see Bhandarkar, D.R., Chhabra., B.Ch., and Gai,G.S., *op.cit.*, pp.312ff. However, it must be remembered in this connection that the expression *prathita-pṛthu-mati* has been used in this epigraph with reference to Skandagupta, not Chandragupta II. And it would be too much to presume that the Purāṇic compilers of the Pramati episode were familiar with the Bhitari or, for that matter, any other Gupta inscription.

The most important points that deserve a close consideration in the present context are: (I) parentage, (II) regnal period, (III) *digvijaya*, (IV) religion and religious policy and (V) divinity of the king.

I. PARENTAGE

As we have seen, the Purāṇas describe king Pramati as the son of Chandramas and as belonging to the Chandramas *gotra* and the lineage of the Bhṛgus. Of these, only the first condition is fully applicable to Samudragupta who was the son and successor of Chandragupta I whose real name was actually Chandra only, the word *gupta* being added as the family name as in the case of all the Gupta kings except only one chief.[93] While Gupta inscriptions are taciturn about the *gotra* of the Gupta emperors, Prabhāvatī Guptā, daughter of Chandragupta II and the dowager queen of the Vākāṭaka king Rudrasena II, is said, in her Poona, Riddhapur and Miregaon plates, to have been of the Dhāraṇa *gotra* (*Dhāraṇa-sagotrā*).[94] A Hindu wife is normally expected to adopt the *gotra* of her husband; but Dhāraṇa was not the *gotra* of Prabhāvatī Guptā's husband, for the Vākāṭakas had Vishṇuvṛddha for their *gotra.*[95] Dhāraṇa was, therefore, probably the *gotra* of the Imperial Guptas. But is may well be assumed that in later times when the Purāṇic accounts of Pramati reflecting the achievements of Samudragupta were composed, Chandra (or Chandramas) had come to be regarded as the *gotra* of the Imperial Guptas after Chandragupta I, the real founder of the Gupta empire; but we cannot be quite sure on this point. Likewise, we have nothing to indicate that the Guptas traced any relationship with the Bhṛgus; but it is not impossible that being Brāhmaṇas they claimed to have been born in a family tracing its descent from the sage Bhṛgu.

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[93] *I.e.* Ghaṭotkacha who is mentioned without the surname *Gupta* in all the inscriptions referring to him.

[94] Sircar, D.C., *Select Inscriptions*, I, p.436, *l*.7 (Poona plates), p.439, *l*.7 (Riddhapur plates). The Miregaon plates still remain unpublished.

[95] This fact is mentioned in all the official records of the Vākāṭakas.

II. REGNAL PERIOD

As pointed out earlier, according to the *Matsya Purāṇa,* Pramati kept himself busy with military expeditions continuously for full thirty years and the twentieth year of his victorious career coincided with the thirty-second year of his reign. Pramati would thus appear to have ruled for a period of at least forty-two years, if not more. On the other hand, we have no definite evidence to determine the length of Samudragupta's reign. However, it is not improbable that he actually ruled for over forty-two years. The solution of this problem, to some extent, depends on that of another intriguing question, *viz.* who founded the Gupta era commencing from 319-20 A.D.: Chandragupta I or Samudragupta. If it is believed that Chandragupta I came to throne in 319-20 A.D., the date of the commencement of the Gupta era, and then married the Lichchhavi princess Kumāradevī, Samudragupta could not have succeeded to power long before the middle of the fourth century A.D., for Samudragupta is represented in his Prayāga *praśasti* to have been specially selected by his father as best suited to succeed him in a full assembly,[96] an event which could have hardly taken place before Samudragupta attained majority and had time to demonstrate his talents. But in the present state of our knowledge there is nothing to show that Chandragupta I's marriage with Kumāradevī took place after his coronation and the foundation of the Gupta era. In all likelihood, this marriage had taken place long before his accession and the institution of the Gupta era which probably marked the assumption by him of the imperial title of *Mahārājādhirāja*,[97] an event of momentous siginificance as his two predecessors were content with the humbler title of *Mahārāja* and were ordinary chiefs, perhaps owing allegiance to some superior power. This event probably took place late in his reign and he did not survive it for long. This will be rendered highly probable if the dates of Samudragupta's Nālandā and Gayā plates,[98] *viz.* years 5 and 9 respectively, are regarded as of the Gupta era. Both these plates are generally treated as later forgeries and cannot be depended upon for historical purposes.[99] But they may well be manipulated later copies of genuine records with certain unintelligent modifications based on the forgers' knowledge of the Gupta history in outline. And their dates may well be genuine. But what these dates connote would also be an insurmountable problem.[100] In case they are referred to the Gupta era, Samudragupta must already have been on the throne in 324-25 A.D.[101] and it is so close to the initial year of the Gupta era that the possibility of its initiation by Samudragupta himself cannot be easily eliminated.[102] Even if this possibility is not accepted, Samudragupta's accession cannot be dated much later. This is strongly suggested not only by the comparative rarity of Chandragupta I's coins but also by the fact that he was content with a single coin-type, *i.e.*, Chandragupta-Kumāradevī type. We may accordingly date Samudragupta's accession not later than 335 A.D.[103] We are in a somewhat better position as regards the close of his reign. His son, Chandragupta II Vikramāditya, as we have seen above, succeeded to imperial power in 376 or 380 A.D. which was, according to the Mathurā pillar inscription of his time, his first regnal year. Rāmagupta, whose historicity is now beyond doubt, thanks to the discovery of the Durjanpur (Vidiśā) Tīrthaṅkara image inscriptions of his reign,[104] apparently ruled for a very short time. His reign may be dated approximately in 374-376 or 378-380 A.D. depending upon the reading *prathama* or *pañchame* in the aforesaid Mathurā inscription. It would, thus, follow that Samudragupta ruled for nearly forty years or more, more probably for over forty-two years (*c*. 330-374 or 335-380 A.D.), and thereby meets, at least approximately, the *Matsya Purāṇa* requirement regarding the length of Pramati's reign.

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[96] *Ibid.*, p.263, verse 4.

[97] *Cf.* Altekar, A.S., *Coinage of the Gupta Empire*, p.2.

[98] Sircar, D.C., *Select Inscription*, I, pp.270-74.

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[99] For a detailed discussion of the grounds for regarding these plates spurious and for a summary of various views on this question, see Goyal, S.R., *Guptakālīna Abhilekha*, pp.72-76.

[100] They may be either years of the Gupta era or regnal years.

[101] The Nālandā plates of this year contain at the end a reference to *Kumāra* Chandragupta, obviously the second Gupta king of that name, which, like the other information contained in this record, may owe its incorporation to the forger who was apparently aware of the fact that Chandragupta had succeeded Samudragupta on the throne and not much significance need be attached to it. *Contra* Goyal, S.R., *Guptakālīna Abhilekha*, p.67.

[102] For strong pleading for such a possibility, see Majumdar, R.C., *A New History of the Indian People*, VI: *The Vākāṭaka-Gupta Age*, pp.131-32, 158-60; *The Classical Age*, pp.4-5, 16; Sircar, D.C., *op.cit.*, p.270, n.4.

[103] Smith placed Samudragupta's accession in *c.*330 A.D., while Allan dates it in 335 A.D. (*BMC, GD*, p.xxxii). H.C. Raychaudhuri (*Political History of Ancient India*, 6th edition, pp.533 and 551) prefers to remain non-committal. At p.599 in connection with the Gupta genealogy also he mentions no date against Samudragupta. R.C. Majumdar (*The Classical Age*, pp.4-5), who is uncertain about the initiator of the Gupta era, dates Samudragupta's accession in about 340 or 350 A.D. if he did not found the Gupta era. He reiterates this position in the *Comprehensive History of India*, III(i), p.371. S.R. Goyal (*A History of the Imperial Guptas*, pp.107-110; *Gupta Sāmrājya kā Itihāsa*, p.10) places his accession in *c.*350 A.D., while P.L. Gupta (*Gupta Sāmrājya*, p.277) gives him the shortest possible reign of only twenty years.

III. DIGVIJAYA

In the Purāṇas, Pramati is depicted as a great general and is said to have subdued the ruling chiefs of the North, Madhyadeśa, mountainous regions, East, West, the Vindhyan regions, Aparānta (Northern Koṅkaṇa in a narrow sense and western region in a broad sense), South, Draviḍa (Tamilnadu), Siṁhala (Ceylon), Gandhāra, Pāradas, Pahlavas, Yavanas, Śakas,[105] Tushāras, Barbaras, Śvetas and Halikas,[106] Daradas, Khaśas, Lampākas,[107] Andhra and the Choras[108] (probably the Cholas).[109]

The description cannot be applied in full to any Indian ruler of the past. But the only historical ruler of ancient India who satisfies most of the requirements best is Samudragupta who is known to have carried his arms far and wide. The patrimony inherited by him was primarily confined to Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh. Samudragupta not only maintained it intact but raised it, by the valour of his arms and diplomacy, to the all-important status of the first-rate all-India power, brought practically the whole of North India under his direct sway and made his prowess felt by almost all the ruling chiefs of India, Ceylon and other islands in the Malay archipelago. A vivid account of his brilliant military achievements is bequeathed to the posterity in his Allahabad pillar inscription. The *praśasti* informs us that the Indian Napoleon violently exterminated many a ruler of Āryāvarta which included the whole of India to the north of the Vindhyas. Those of the vanquished chiefs who are mentioned by name and have been satisfactorily identified were ruling in eastern and central India and what was known as Madhyadeśa. He also defeated several rulers of Dakshiṇāpatha, *i.e.*, India south of the Vindhyas. Of these, we find specification of twelve kings along with the names of the territories ruled over by them. These included chiefs of various countries located in the present states of Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and Tamilnadu. The monarchical and tribal states situated on the frontiers of his empire which are said to have accepted his authority and paid tributes to him belonged to Bangla Desh, West Bengal, Assam, Nepal, Punjab, Rajasthan and Central India. Samudragupta also reduced to servility the ruling chiefs of all the forest kingdoms which were situated along the Vindhyas. Various kinds of homage were paid to him also by such foreign powers as the Kushāṇa chiefs of the North-West (now Pakistan), the Śaka chiefs of Western India, the rulers of Siṁhala (Ceylon) and all the other islands (Indianised Asia).[110] It would, thus, follow that the narrative of Pramati's military exploits tallies substantially with what we know of Samudragupta.

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[104] *EI*, XXXVII, pp.46-50; Goyal, S.R., *Guptakālīna Abhilekha*, pp.93-98; Bhandarkar, Chhabra and Gai, *op.cit.*, pp.233-34.

[105] As pointed out above, the *Vāyu* does not mention the Śakas.

[106] The *Vāyu* and the *Brahmāṇḍa* do not mention the Śveta-Halikas (or Śvetas and Halikas) and replace them by Chīnas and Śūlikas.

[107] The *Brahmāṇḍa* reads Lampākāras instead of Lampākas.

[108] The *Vāyu* replaces Andhras and Chora-jātis by Ketas and Kirāta-jātis and the *Brahmāṇḍa* by Katakas and Kirāta-jātis respectively.

[109] As stated earlier, the *Liṅga* account does not name the peoples and countries conquered by Pramati.

In the Purāṇas Pramati is said to have been continuously on march for full thirty years.[111] A perusal of the Allahabad pillar inscription also leaves the impression that Samudragupta must have spent a major part of his long reign in military activities involving the observance of at least a couple of horse sacrifices.[112]

These conquests are said to have elevated Pramati to the position of a universal monarch (*pravṛtta-chakra*). Samudragupta is also styled as unrivalled on the earth (*pṛthivyām=apratirathaḥ*),[113] which is almost the same as *pravṛitta-chakra.*

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[110] Bhandarkar, Chhabra and Gai, *op.cit.*, pp.211ff. For a full discussion of these conquests, see Goyal, S.R., *Gupta Sāmrājya kā Itihāsa,* Chs.V-VI.

[111] The *Vāyu, Brahmāṇḍa* and *Liṅga,* however, reduce this figure, which is found in the *Matsya*, to twenty, evidently due to copyists' error.

[112] This conclusion is based on the two types of legends on his Aśvamedha type coins and his description as *anek-Āśvamedha-yājin* in some of the records of his grand-daughter Prabhāvatī Guptā.

[113] Sircar, D.C., *op.cit.*, p.266, *l.* 24. Also *cf.* the title *chatur=udadhi-salil-āsvādita-yaśas* (Fleet, *CII,* III, No.13, *l.*1) and *sarva-rāj-ochchhettā* (Kācha type coin-reverse; Bilsad pillar inscription, *l.*2) applied to Samudragupta in later Gupta records. The *biruda apratiratha* occurs on the obverse and reverse of Samudragupta's Archer type coins also. See Altekar, A.S., *op.cit.*, p.55. It is pertinent to note that these *birudas* are typical of Samudragupta and are not applied to any other Gupta ruler.

Pramati is represented as attended by hundreds and thousands of weapon-wielding Brāhmaṇas which is quite intelligible in the light of the now established fact that the Guptas themselves were Brāhmaṇas. It must be noted in this connection that Harisheṇa, who was apparently a Brāhmaṇa, was Samudragupta's minister of peace and war (*Sāndhi-vigrahika*) and Chief Commander of Armed Forces (*Mahā-daṇḍa-nāyaka).*

IV. RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS POLICY

Pramati is described as having been Vishṇu in the former birth[114] and born from the particles of Mādhava (Vishṇu).[115] This description may be taken to indicate that Pramati was himself a devout Vaishṇava and extended liberal patronage to Vaishṇavism. Although the sectarian title of *parama-bhāgavata* is not applied to Samudragupta in his definitely genuine records[116] and in the official records of his successors, the presence of the *garuḍa-dhvaja* on his gold coins and of the wheel-standard (*chakra-dhvaja*) on the Kācha type coins[117] should leave absolutely no room for doubt that Samudragupta, like his successors, was a staunch devotee of Vishṇu. His description in the Allahabad pillar inscription as the incomprehensible Purusha who is the cause of prosperity to the virtuous and destruction of the wicked',[118] which is undoubtedly borrowed from the *Bhagavad-Gītā* (VI. 8), is also a strong pointer in this direction and undoubtedly goes well with Pramati's eulogy that he was born from the particles of Mādhava.[119]

Pramati is said to have destroyed all the *pāshaṇḍas* (heretical sects). Like him, Samudragupta was a great patron of Brāhmaṇical Hindusim. He revived the then-not-so-popular Aśvamedha sacrifice, with full complements, which was commemorated by him by the issue of a new type of gold coins with a couple of varieties befitting the occasion, and his successors proudly proclaimed this achievement only in the case of this emperor. The whole of the Allahabad pillar inscription reverberates with such sentiments as would emanate only from a staunch adherent of Brāhmaṇism. And just as Pushyamitra Śuṅga's attempt at the revival of and patronage to Brāhmaṇical Hinduism was interpreted by the Buddhists as indicative of his hostility towards their own religion, so also Samudragupta's enthusiasm and zeal for Hinduism may have appeared to some as antipathy towards non-Brāhmaṇical sects.

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[114] This is stated not only in the *Matsya* but, as stated earlier, also in the *Liṅga*. As shown above, the *Vāyu* and *Brahmāṇḍa* versions have different readings which are due to later copyists.

[115] Excluding only the *Matsya* version. The summary found in the *Liṅga* has corrupted Mādhava into Mānava, for there is no point in saying that Pramati was born from the particles of Mānava.

[116] The Nālandā and Gayā plates, which employ this epithet for Samudragupta (Sircar, *op.cit.*, pp.271, 273), are, as stated above, generally regarded as spurious. It would not be wise to build much on the basis of their evidence.

[117] It is almost certain that Kācha was just another name of Samudragupta.

[118] See below for it.

[119] See n. 115 above.

V. DIVINITY OF THE KING

According to the *Matsya*, Mānava, an ancestor of Pramati, is styled verily a god among men (*nṛ-deva*),[120] evidently alluding to the age-old Indian theory of the divinity of the king. Samudragupta, the first great Gupta emperor, popularised this theory and claimed for himself some sort of divinity. In the Allahabad pillar inscription he is described as 'the incomprehensible Purusha who was the cause of prosperity of the virtuous and destruction of the wicked '(*sādhvasādh-ūdaya-pralaya-hetu-purushasy-āchintyasya*), 'equal to Dhanada (Kubera), Varuṇa, Indra and Antaka' (Yama) (*Dhanada-Varuṇ-Endr-Āntaka-samasya*),[121] 'a god with an earthly abode' (*loka-dhāmno devasya*) and as 'a mortal only in celebrating the rites of the observances of the mankind' (*loka-samaya-kkriy-ānuvidhāna-mātra-mānushasya*).[122] To sum up, if the authors of the Purāṇic accounts of king Pramati had the career of any historical figure to serve as a model before themselves, it could have been no other than Samudragupta's. He alone of all the ancient Indian rulers satisfies most of the eulogy of Pramati.[123]

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[120] V.S. Agrawala, by oversight, took it to refer to Pramati himself. This statement is not found in the other versions of the episode.

[121] This description is found in the Bilsad stone pillar inscription of Kumāragupta I also. See Sircar, *op.cit.*, p.285, *l*.2.

[122] Also *cf.* the title *Kṛtānta-paraśu* found in inscriptions of Samudragupta's successors as well as in the legend of his battle-axe type coins.

[123] S.R. Goyal was aware of V.S. Agrawala's opinion about Pramati when he wrote his *A History of the Imperial Guptas* which was published in 1967, but he merely noted it in footnotes without passing any comment on it. See p.71, n.2, and p.250, n.1. Later (1987) in his Hindi book *Gupta Sāmrājya kā Itihāsa*, pp.169-71, he took a critical note of Agrawala's suggestion and suggested, independently of our writing on the subject published in mid-sixties and arguing, generally speaking on the same lines, Pramati's possible equation with Samudragupta. This is also repeated in his *Samudragupta Parākramāṅka* (Meerut, 1987), pp.265-67.

Some other personages named Pramati or Pramiti are also mentioned in the Purāṇas. See Siddheshwarshastri Chitrav, *Bhāratavarshīya Prāchīna Charitra-kośa*, Poona, 1932, pp.356-57

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Some Observations on the Identification of 'Chandra' with Samudragupta

V.C. Pandey

The Meharauli Pillar Inscription[1] constitutes one of the most controversial epigraphs of ancient India. It is a posthumous record of a king named 'Chandra' and his achievements.

S.R. Goyal, famous for his scholarly involvement in Gupta studies, continues to hold the view that 'Chandra' should be identified with Samudragupta. His contention is that the main basis for the identification of a king should be his achievements and not his name.[2] But this contention, on the very face of it, is untenable for the simple reason that the scribe of an inscription enjoys the liberty of omitting, magnifying, emphasising or de-emphasising the exploits of a king but he cannot alter the name of the king beyond understandable limits. For instance, Śaśāṅka may be described as Soma, both being synonymous, Chandragupta II may be called Devagupta[3] or Devarāja[4] only because the latter was his second name and Aśoka could be called Priyadarśin. But there is no evidence, whatsoever, to suggest that Samudragupta was called 'Chandra' as well. Samudragupta has left behind two *praśasti*'s[5] and two copper plates[6] as also at least six types of gold coins. None of them contain the slightest suggestion that he had assumed 'Chandra' as his other name. The records of his successors speaks of him as Samudragupta. The contemporary dynasties too do not refer him as 'Chandra'. Even supposing that 'Chandraprakāśa' of Vāmana is identifiable with Samudragupta,[7] the former name has never been used for him in his dynastic or contemporary records. As such, the identification of the king Chandra of the Meharauli Pillar Inscription with Samudragupta is completely ruled out. Of all the records of Samudragupta the Allahabad Pillar Inscription is by far the most authentic by virtue of being comprehensive, sequence-wise, event-wise, region-wise and composed by a top-ranking officer of Samudragupta. It naturally deserves more credibility than the Meharauli Pillar Inscription composed by an anonymous scribe.

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[1] Sircar, D.C., *SI*, Vol. I, pp.203-85.

[2] Goyal, S.R., *Gupta aura Vākāṭaka Sāmrājyoṅ kā Yuga*, pp.144-49.

[3] Chammak Copper Plate Inscription.

[4] Sanchi Inscription.

[5] Allahabad Pillar Inscription and Eran Inscription.

[6] Gayā and Nālandā Copper Plate Inscriptions.

[7] Smith, V.A., *EHI*, p.347.

A comparative study of the two inscriptions will bring out, in high relief, the differences between the two:

1. While the Allahabad Pillar Inscription alludes to the attractiveness of the battle-scarred body of the war-like king Samudragupta,[8] the Meharauli Pillar Inscription derives pleasure from the likeness between Chandra's shining face and the moon.[9]

2. The Allahabad Pillar Inscription contains the genealogy of Samudragupta as also the names of his mother and her dynasty.[10] The Meharauli Pillar Inscription does not say a word about Chandra's antecedents.

3. The Allahabad Pillar Inscription speaks of Samataṭa as a *pratyanta* kingdom.[11] But the Meharauli Pillar Inscription describes a war between Chandra and a confederacy of his enemies in Vaṅga.[12]

4. According to the Allahabad Pillar Inscription, the foreign rulers bearing the titles *'Daivaputra Shāhi Shāhānushāhi* and the Śakas, Muruṇḍas and the people of Siṁhala and all the islands had sought Samudragupta's friendship by fulfilling certain obligations.[13] The Meharauli Pillar Inscription refers to Chandra's crossing of the seven mouths of the Indus and conquering the Vāhlikas.[14]

5. The Allahabad Pillar Inscription gives a detailed account of Samudragupta's campaign in South India. But the Meharauli Pillar Inscription only says that the Southern Ocean is still fragrant with the breeze of Chandra's valour.[15]

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[8] *Paraśu-śara-śaṅku-ādyāneka-praharaṇa-virūḍha-kula-vraṇa-śatāṅka-śobhā...*

[9] *Chandrāhvena-samagra-Chandra-sadraśiṁ vaktra-śrīyaṁ bibhratā.*

[10] *Mahārāja Śrīgupta-prapautrasya Mahārāja Śrī Ghaṭotkacha-pautrasya Mahārājādhirāja Śrī Chandraguptaputrasya Lichchhavi-dauhitrasya Mahādevyāṁ Kumāradevyāmutpannasya Mahārājādhirāja Śrī Samudraguptasya....*

[11] *Samataṭa-Ḍavāka-Kāmarūpa-Nepāla-Kartṛpurādi-pratyanta-nṛpatibhiḥ.*

[12] *Śattrūn sametyāgatān Vaṅgeshvāhava....*

[13] *Ātma-nivedana-kanyopāyana-dāna-Gurutmadaṅka-svavishaya-bhukti-śāsana-yāchana.*

[14] *Tīrtvā sapta-mukhāni yena samare Sindhorjjitā Vāhlikā.*

[15] *Yasyādyāpyadhivāsyate jalanidhir vvīryyānilairddakshiṇaḥ.*

6. The Allahabad Pillar Inscription does not describe Samudragupta as a Vaishṇava. But the Meharauli Pillar Inscription refers to Chandra's devotion to Vishṇu and his installing of the *Vishṇudhvaja* on the Vishṇupada hill.[16]

7. The Allahabad Pillar Inscription is a contemporary record of Samudragupta while the Meharauli Pillar Inscription is a posthumous record.[17]

These points need further elucidation.

Though the coins of Samudragupta and Chandragupta II portray them as strongly built, Chandragupta II, as the description in the Meharauli Pillar Inscription goes, had greater facial charm than his physically scarred father. And if the legend *Rūpākṛtī* on some of the coins of Chandragupta II refers to the beauty of his form, this difference becomes more pronounced.

In the absence of the genealogical list in the Meharauli Pillar Inscription, it has been extremely difficult to determine the dynasty and placement of Chandra. This explains why Chandra has been identified with different kings. However, the script of the inscription has been assigned to the Gupta period by most of the scholars, though Prinsep puts it in the early third-fourth century and Bhau Daji in the post-Gupta period.

The word 'Vaṅga' used to stand for the whole of Bengal in earlier days.[18] But in the time of the Guptas it comprised a number of separate territorial units such as Samataṭa (the coastal region of modern Bangladesh), Vaṅga (the delta of the Gaṅgā and the Brahmaputra comprising Jessore region), Tāmralipti (Midnapore region) and Karṇasuvarṇa (Murshidabad region).

Samudragupta is spoken of in connection with Samataṭa only which, as gleaned from his inscription, was not annexed by him to his empire. It was a subordinate ally only on his eastern frontier. The other parts of Bengal were obviously independent of Samudragupta's domination.

But quite different is the position in the Meharauli Pillar Inscription. It does not mention Samataṭa at all. Instead, it speaks of Chandra's victory over a confederacy of his enemies in Vaṅga.

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[16] *Tenāyaṁ praṇidhāya bhūmi-patinā bhāvena Vishṇau matiṁ prānśur vvishṇupade girau bhagavato Vishṇordhvajar sthāpitaḥ.*

[17] *Mūrttyā karmma-jitāvanīm gatavataḥ kīrttyā sthitasya kshitau.*

[18] *Mahā.*, Sabhā, 30.23.

Goyal would make us believe that Samudragupta had already occupied Bengal by defeating Chandravarman, its king, who finds mention in the Susunia Inscription and is identifiable with the king of that name defeated by Samudragupta in the second Āryāvarta War. But several factors mitigate against this theory. Firstly, the Allahabad Pillar Inscription does not include Bengal in Āryāvarta. All the kings defeated in the two Āryāvarta Wars are shown as ruling in the west of Bengal. Secondly, if Bengal was conquered in the Āryāvarta War, there is no reason why Samataṭa, a part of Bengal, was described by Harisheṇa as a *pratyanta* kingdom. It is only proper to assume that Samudragupta had Samataṭa alone as his subordinate frontier ally, while other parts of Bengal including Vaṅga lay outside the area of his influence. What Chandra did, according to the Meharauli Pillar Inscription, amounted to crushing the combined might of a number of rulers in Bengal, including Vaṅga and perhaps Samataṭa who challenged the Gupta power. Chattopadhyaya observes that the conquest of Vaṅga possibly occurred at the close of the career of the monarch, that is the reason why we do not have any other record, epigraphic or numismatic, of his age to throw light on the subject.[19] But this observation does not fit in the logic of history. The formation of a confederacy of kings and its defiance of Chandra in Vaṅga ought to have taken place in the beginning rather than at the close of his career if they had any chance of success. Chandragupta II's first few years might have constituted a period of anxiety in the wake of the Śaka invasion and the deadly confrontation of Rāmagupta with his brother. The early occurrence of the Vaṅga war is also suggested by the Meharauli Pillar Inscription which has it as the first military action in its description. But Bengal did not form part of the empire of either Samudragupta or Chandragupta II as is suggested by the total absence of their coins and inscriptions there. Gupta inscriptions are found in Bengal during the reign of Kumāragupta I for the first time. Thus, Samudragupta and Chandra had different types of relationship with Bengal which goes against their identification.

In regard to the north-western region, the position is still more complicated. Though Samudragupta had forged friendship with the foreign rulers bearing the titles *Daivaputra Shāhi Shāhānushāhi* and with the Śakas and the Muruṇḍas, there is no evidence whatsoever to show that their kingdoms were included in his empire. No coins and inscriptions of Samudragupta have been discovered in the Panjab.[20]

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[19] *EHNI*, p.206.

However, the Meharauli Pillar Inscription gives to Chandra the credit of having crossed the seven mouths (*saptamukhāni*) of the Indus and defeated the Vāhlikas. Majumdar[21] and Jayaswal[22] would make us believe that the term *saptamukhāni* means the seven rivers—five rivers of the Panjab and the Kabul and Kunar. Goyal seems to agree with their view. However, they have not quoted a single literary evidence to show that the word *mukha* has ever been used in the sense of a river. Again, Majumdar and Sircar have identified Vāhlika with Bactria.[23] Thus, according to them, Chandra had passed through the Panjab, crossed the Hindukush and defeated the Bactrians. Goyal too holds the view that Chandra (Samudragupta) had led his expedition through the Panjab. But he has modified the contention of these scholars to the extent that Chandra had gone upto Peshawar alone to help his subordinate ally, Kidāra Kushāṇa, against the Hūṇa invasion. Stretching his imagination a little too far, he identifies the Vāhlikas with the Hūṇas for the simple reason that they had come from Bactria. Needless to say that these contentions are more fanciful than logical.

The Vāhlikas were an ancient people. Their king Prātīpya has been mentioned in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*.[24] According to the *Uttara Rāmāyaṇa*, they lived outside Madhyadeśa.[25] But in the *Mahābhārata*, they have become synonymous with the Vāhīkas. This explains why king Śalya has been described as Vāhīka[26] and his sister Mādrī as Vāhlikī.[27] The intermingling of the Vāhīkas (the people of the Panjab) with the foreigners including the Bactrians (Vāhlikas) led to the growth of some outlandist practices among them, such as the *śaulka*[28] form of marriage and the *satī* custom.[29] The *Mahābhārata* has it that Bhīshma was greatly astonished when Śalya demanded śulka for the marriage of his sister Mādrī while the Greek writers mention that the *satī* custom was practised by the Kaṭhas.[30] However, it had crept into the Panjab as evidenced by the performance of this custom by widowed Mādrī. It was probably on account of these non-Aryan practices obtaining in the Vāhlika country that Karṇa described it in most despicable terms. It derived its name from *bahiḥ* (being outside Āryāvarta).[31] Śākala, its capital has been described as Vāhīka-grāma by the Kāśikākāra.[32] However, it appears that the Vāhlikas (Bactrians) were rapidly Indianised. They came to bear Indian names, such as Bṛhadratha[33] and Somadatta.[34] It is also said that Vāhlika was one of the three sons of Pratīpa, the other two being Devāpi and Śāntanu.[35] It was perhaps in the process of their Indianisation that the word *Vāhlika* was corrupted into *Vāhīka*. Thus, Sircar's view[36] that the reading *Vālhīkan* in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (II.69. 18-19) is a mistake for *Vāhīkān* is ill-conceived, because both words were being treated as synonyms. Generally speaking, Vāhīka comprised eastern Panjab. As such it did not lay beyond the Indus (Sindhu). Since Chandragupta II's Bull type of copper coins are found in South-east Panjab alone, his expedition was confined to this region. The belief that he had crossed the seven rivers and reached as far as Bactria or Peshawar, has no basis.

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[20] A Gaḍahara coin with the name of 'Samudra' inscribed on it found in the north-west is a dubious evidence of Samudragupta's direct control over that region.

[21] *JRASBL*, IX, pp.179ff.

[22] *JBORS*, XVIII, pp.31ff.

[23] *P.V. Kane Vol.*, Art. No.64.

[24] *Śat. Brā.*, 12. 9. 3. 1-3.

[25] *Rāmā.*, Uttara Kāṇḍa, 103-21.

[26] *Mahā.*, Ādi., 112.3.

[27] *Ibid.*, 124. 21.

[28] *Ibid.*, 13. 44. 9.

[29] *Ibid.*, 1. 95. 65.

In fact, the Sapta-sindhu region was only a historical entity during the Gupta period. With the disappearance of the Sarasvatī and the dissipation of the popularity of Ārjīkīya, the Sapta-sindhu region had yielded place to the Pañchanada region much before this time.[37] The inclusion of the two foreign rivers, the Kabul and the Kunar, in the group of five rivers of the Panjab to preserve the old Sapta-sindhu concept would be grossly unjustifiable. Under these circumstances it is untenable to interpret *saptamukhāni* as seven rivers of the Panjab.

The term *saptamukhāni* may be taken to mean differently. As described by Ptolemy,[38] the Indus (Sindhu) while entering the sea was divided into seven streams. That the riverine streams were called

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[30] *McCrindle*, pp.69-70.
[31] *Mahābhāshya*, 4. 1. 85, p.95.
[32] *Ibid.*, 4. 2. 117.
[33] *Ibid.*, 1. 185. 21.
[34] *Ibid.*, 2. 126. 15.
[35] *Mahā.*, 1. 94. 61.
[36] *P.V. Kane Vol.*, Art. No.64.
[37] *Mahābhāshya*, 4. 1. 88, p.100.
[38] *Geography*, 7. 1. 2.

mukhāni is made clear in the *Raghuvaṁśa*[39] when it says—*nadī mukhenaiva samudramāviśat*. Hence Chattopadhyaya[40] seems to be reasonable in taking the *Sindhoḥ saptamukhāni* to mean the Indus delta. As such, Chandra must have entered the Panjab through the Indus delta and not through Madhyadeśa, as assumed by us earlier.[41]

There seems to have been a specific reason for Chandra's recourse to this route. It is likely that the Śakasthāna and the Indus delta were held by the foreigners, probably the Sassanians. The *Periplus* informs us that the Indus flew through the Śakasthāna. The *Sāgarakukshisthāna Mlechchhān* referred to in the *Mahābhārata*[42] immediately after Śākala, the capital of the Madras, may suggest the foreigners (Sassanians) occupying the Sindhu delta. Chandragupta II's assault on the Sindhu delta and the Vāhlikas might have been an extension of his successful war against the Śakas of Saurāshṭra, for he could not have invaded Sind without first subduing Saurāshṭra in the rear. His repulsion of the Vaṅga enemies seems to have taken place during the early year of his reign. But the conquest of Saurāshṭra, Sindhu delta and the eastern Panjab must have taken place after he had consolidated his position. In any case the details of the military expedition are more applicable to Chandragupta II than Samudragupta who is nowhere said to have conquered the Śakas of Saurāshṭra, to have crossed the Sindhu delta and conquered (*jitā*) eastern Panjab. That Samudragupta's friendly relations with *Daivaputrashāhishāhānushāhi* etc. were the result of his wars against them is nowhere indicated in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription. Altekar thought that Chandragupta II had led the expedition against the Kidāra Kushāṇas.[43] Had it been so, the scribe of the Meharauli Pillar Inscription would have used the title *Daivaputrashāhi* or *Shāhānushāhi*, with which they were associated in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription, and not chosen a new term 'Vāhlika' which was hardly used for them in India.

Buddha Prakash has bodily lifted the details of Raghu's military expedition upto the Oxus (Vaṅkshu) described by Kālidāsa in his *Raghuvaṁśa* and attributed them to the western campaign of Chandra of the Meharauli Pillar Inscription without giving any allowance to the poetic fancy that the great author might have indulged in. His conclusion[44] that Chandragupta II led an expedition in Bactriana in order to remove the menace of the 'Śakas, Kushāṇas and Pārasikas root and branch' is not supported by evidence.

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[39] *Raghu.*, III. 2 III. 28.

[40] *EHNI*, p.206.

[41] *Vishva Bandhu Com. Vol.* (*VIJ*, Vol.XII)). Vaṅgas and Vāhlikas of the Meharauli Pillar Inscription.

[42] *Mahā.*, 2. 32. 16.

[43] *Vākāṭaka-Gupta Age*, p.21.

While the Allahabad Pillar Inscription gives details of Samudragupta's military campaign in South India, the Meharauli Pillar Inscription has only to say that the Southern Ocean was still fragrant with the breeze of the valour of Chandra. The latter description has been made without any supporting facts and should, therefore, be taken as a conventional and hyperbolic tribute paid by the scribe to his deceased master. As Sircar has pertinently observed, the Meharauli Pillar Inscription is a *praśasti* which may have germs of truth, but is conventional and may not be entirely historical.[45] Chandragupta II's forging of matrimonial alliances with the South Indian dynasties—the Vākāṭakas and the Kadambas—are not suggestive of his valour. At the best they can be termed as the master strokes of diplomacy. But according to the ins-cription he was known in South India for his valour. Some scholars have tried to explain this portion of the inscription by detecting in it a veiled reference to Chandra's participation in his fathers South Indian campaign. But this explanation also lacks positive evidence. P.L. Gupta[46] has alluded to Chandragupta II's conquest of South India on the basis of the Purāṇic evidence. *Vishṇu Purāṇa* makes the following statement—

Kośalā-Oḍra-Tāmraliptān Samudrataṭapurīm cha Devarakshito rakshyati.

Devarakshita is synoym of Devagupta which was another name of Chandragupta.

But the *Vāyu Purāṇa* gives a somewhat different version:

Kośalanścha Āndhra Pauṇḍrānścha Tāmraliptān sasāgarān/
Champām chaiva Purīm ramyam bhokshyanti Devarakshitāḥ.

Thus, it omits Oḍra from, and includes Āndhra, Pauṇḍra and Champā in, the former list of the conquered regions. Additionally, it mentions that these regions were conquered by Devarakshitas, and not by Devarakshita. On account of this variance in descriptions and total absence of any corroborative evidence—literary, numismatic or epigraphic—the theory of Chandragupta's conquest of South India upto as far as Andhradeśa and Oḍra seems to be extremely untenable. Thus, the nature of Chandra's relationship with South India cannot be determined with any amount of certainty. Probably, what the scribe of the Meharauli Pillar Inscription wanted to convey was that Chandra's fame and not his arms, had reached as far as the South Ocean.

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[44] *Studies in Indian History and Culture*, p.326, *JRASB*, *L*, 1947, pp.31-39.

[45] *SI*, p.284., fn.1.

[46] *Gupta Sāmrājya*, p.102.

As regards the personal religion of Chandra of the Meharauli Pillar Inscription, there is no doubt that he was a devotee of Lord Vishṇu and had installed the Meharauli Pillar as a Vishṇudhvaja on the Vishṇupada hill. The *Rāmāyaṇa,* (II.69.18-19) would make us believe that the Vishṇupada was in the vicinity of the Beas (Vapāśā) in eastern Punjab. The Vishnudhvaja was installed on that hill top which, as tradition has it, was later shifted to Meharauli by some later king.

But to say that Samudragupta was also a Vaishṇava appears to be untenable. We have tried to refute elsewhere the views of Sircar and Chhabra in this regard.[47] We reiterate that unlike Chandragupta II, Samudragupta has never been called a Paramabhāgavata or one devoted to Lord Vishṇu (*Vishṇau matim*). All the evidence that the protagonists of his Vaishṇavite faith have so far been able to produce in support of their contention is imprecise and indirect. Sircar, Chhabra and Goyal have taken the epithets *Purushasyāchintyasya* and *Lokadhāmno devasya* used for Samudargupta in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription to refer to Lord Vishṇu. But such epithets could be used for any deity of the worshipper. It is significant to note that while such deities as Dhanada, Varuṇa, Indra and Antaka as also Paśupati are mentioned in the Allahabad Inscription Lord Vishṇu, whose devotee Samudragupta is made out to be by these scholars, is conspicuous by the absence of his name.

If the term *Apratirathaḥ* used for Samudragupta is a synonym of Lord Vishṇu, it should have been used for his successors also some of whom were irrefutably Vaishṇavas. The fact is that the term only means 'without an antagonist'. It is in this sense that it has been used elsewhere also.

Samudragupta has been described as '*sādhvasādhūdaya pralayahetupurushasya*'. The description reminds one of the king's additional obligation of protecting the noble and punishing the wicked. Its wording and import are different from those of the well-known *śloka* of the

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[47] *VIJ*, XI, 'A Note on Apratirthaḥ'.

Gītā suggested by Goyal to prove that Samudragupta was a Vaishṇava. If we accept his contention, Samudragupta will not remain a Vaishṇava only. He would become Vishṇu incarnate. In regard to the adoption of Garuḍa and Lakshmī as emblem we are of the opinion of that the adoption of Garuḍa as the royal emblem of Samudragupta appears to have been motivated by political rather than religious considerations. Garuḍa, the arch-enemy of the serpents (nāgas)[48] heralded the truimph of the Gupta monarch over the Nāga princes. The goddess Lakshmī has never been depicted on the coins of Samudragupta in the company of her consort Lord Vishṇu. In fact, her figure appears to be a replica of Ardoksho rather than an Indian goddess.

At best Samudragupta was a Brāhmaṇist, a fact well attested by the performance of the horse sacrifice by him and his comparison with the deities other than Vishṇu— namely, Dhanada, Varuṇa, Indra and Antaka.

Since the Allahabad Pillar Inscription is a contemporary record of Samudragupta and was composed by Harisheṇa, his minister of war and peace, and was probably revised by the emperor himself before it was inscribed, it is more accurate and comprehensive than the Meharauli Pillar Inscription which was composed after the death of the king mentioned in it. Its smallness was also due to the difficulties of the scribe engraving on the stiff surface of an iron pillar.

However, a comparative study of the two inscriptions, notwithstanding some unsolved problems, reasonably differentiates Chandra from Samudragupta. The identification of Chandra with Chandragupta II is more probable than with any other king of ancient India.

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[48] *Mahā.*, I. 24. 13.

11

Did Kumāragupta I Abdicate? A Study of the Numismatic and Epigraphic Data

Ashvini Agrawal

There is a gold coin of Kumāragupta I in the collection of the British Museum, London, which was procured from Mathurā. Of the earliest scholars who studied this coin, Vincent Smith, designated it as 'Two Queens type' as he thought that the obverse scene on this coin depicts Kumāragupta flanked by his two queens.[1] But he was unable to bring out its significance as the circular legend on this coin was illegible. When John Allan published it in his *Catalogue* of the Gupta coins,[2] he agreed with Smith's interpretation of the obverse scene adding that the lady on the left looked quite foreign in her appearance and was like Minerva. He, however, designated it as 'Pratāpa type' on the basis of his reading of the reverse legend as *Śrī Pratāpaḥ*. Beyond this nothing could be made out from this solitary specimen of this type known till then.

The discovery of the Bayana hoard of the Gupta gold coins in 1946 brought to light eight more specimens of this type which were published by A.S. Altekar in the *Catalogue of the Coins in the Bayana Hoard*,[3] as well as in volume ten of the *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India*.[4] Though the circular legend on the obverse still defied decipherment, a number of corrections were made in the description of these coins by Prof. Altekar. He pointed out that the obverse does not show Kumāragupta flanked by two ladies but the three figures consist of Kumāragupta, in the dress of a monk in the centre, flanked by another male figure in warrior's dress on his right and a lady in *vitarka-mudrā* on his left. He also pointed out that the reverse legend is not *Śrī Pratāpa* as read by Allan but *Apratighaḥ* and therefore he labelled them as 'Apratigha type', a name which has stuck to them since then. This discovery has opened a floodgate of interpretations of this rather unique type of coins, but before we discus them it is pertinent to describe it in detail.

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[1] *JRAS*, 1889, p.109.

[2] *CCGD, BM*, pp.xcii, 87.

[3] *Catalogue of the Gupta Gold Coins in the Bayana Hoard*, pp.cx-cxii and 303-06.

[4] *JNSI*, X, p.115.

The obverse of these coins depicts in the centre a male figure standing to front in the dress of a monk, wearing a long loose robe and a protuberance on his head (or hair tied in a knot), with his hands folded on chest in *jñānamudrā* attitude. On his right is another male figure[5] in the dress of a warrior, wearing helmet, left hand akimbo[6] and the right hand extended towards the central figure,[7] as if expressing ignorance or uncertainty about the subject being discussed. Behind the central figure is the Garuḍa standard on his right and a crescent on his left. On the left side of the central figure is depicted a lady wearing a *sārī* and jewelry with left hand akimbo and holding out right hand in the attitude of argumentation (*vitarkamudrā*). Between the central figure and the female on his left is the legend *Kumāra* written horizontally and placed vertically, letters running from top to bottom whereas on the right of the central figure is written *guptaḥ* in the same manner but the letters running from bottom to top.[8] The long circular legend on the margin is not clear.

The reverse of this type shows goddess Lakshmī seated, facing, on a full-blown double petalled lotus, holding a lotus flower in her uplifted right hand and resting her left hand on knee. There is a border of dots and a symbol on left. The legend on the right side is *Apratighaḥ*.[9]

The central figure on the obverse is no doubt that of Kumāragupta I as it has been specifically labelled as such. The scene, however, poses certain questions, which it is not easy to answer. For instance, why has

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[5] Hoernle, Smith and Allan erroneously identified it as the figure of a lady.

[6] Altekar thinks that the man is holding a shield in his left hand. His view has been accepted by almost all the scholars. But a careful examination of the coins shows that there is no shield in his hand which is akimbo and the position of his arm is such that Altekar mistook it for a shield. S.V. Sohoni has rightly asked why should a man hold a shield in his left hand when he has no weapon in his right, specially when the scene does not demand it. *JNSI*, XVIII, p.59.

[7] The Garuḍa-standard is not held by the man on the right side as Altekar thought but is behind the central figure and not in anyone's hand. This was the usual practice followed on the Gupta coins. Cf. Archer type and Swordsman type of Kumāragupta I, etc.

[8] R.C. Majumdar read the legend on the obverse as *Mihirakula* instead of *Kumāraguptaḥ* which is absolutely untenable. Cf. *JNSI*, XII, p.73.

[9] Allan had read it as *Śrī Pratāpaḥ*. Recently S.V. Sohoni has reiterated his view (*JNSI*, XXIII, p.347) without giving any justification. After the discovery of eight coins of this type in the Bayana hoard there is no place for any doubt in the reading *Apratighaḥ*.

Kumāragupta been shown in the dress of a monk ? Who are the two other persons depicted on the obverse? These questions still defy a satisfactory explanation though many suggestions have been put forward. We have already referred to the views of Smith and Allan. A.F.R. Hoernle, who was the first scholar to write on this coin, thought that it depicts the Buddha worshipped by two women.[10] V.V. Mirashi thought that the central figure is that of some sage to whom Kumāragupta and his queen had gone for advice in the hour of some national calamity.[11] R.C. Majumdar opined that these figures represent Śiva flanked by Nandī and Pārvatī.[12] Ajit Ghosh has taken it as a representation of Kumāragupta being blessed by his parents.[13] The uncertainty about the correct interpretation is evident from the fact that S.V. Sohoni has changed his view about this type as many as three times. In 1943 he identified the figures on the obverse of the coin in the British Museum as those of Kārtikeya and his two wives,[14] but changed his view in 1956 after the discovery of the Bayana hoard and described them as those of Kumāragupta flanked by sage Kaśyapa and his wife Aditi, who are shown blessing the king, before he set out to fight Tāraka.[15] Apparently not satisfied with this explanation he discarded it in 1961 in favour of a fresh interpretation and identified the scene on these coins as depicting Kumāragupta being blessed by Śrī and Pratāpa, the personifications of Lakshmī, the goddess of fortune, and Valour.[16]

While editing the catalogue of the coins in the Bayana hoard, A.S. Altekar expressed the view that the scene perhaps depicts the abdication of Kumāragupta I. He remarked, "We may, however, hazard a conjecture about the meaning of the obverse motif. The legend on the reverse usually bears a close connection with the motif of the obverse and refers to the principal figure occurring there. Here it is *apratigha* and means 'invincible'. This may refer to the principal figure on the obverse side namely Kumāragupta. He, however, appears in non-regal dress and is seen folding his hands and the lady on the right is violently arguing with him. Can it be that the motif refers to the abdication of the king on religious grounds and the effort made by his queen and general or crown-prince to dissuade him ? Kumāragupta was firm in his resolve and is, therefore, described on the reverse as invincible."[17]

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[10] *JASB*, 1883, p.144.

[11] *JNSI*, XII, p.69.

[12] *Ibid.*, p.73.

[13] *Ibid.*, XXII, p.180.

[14] *Sachchidanand Sinha Commemoration Volume*, 1943, pp.177-78.

[15] *JNSI*, XVIII, p.61.

[16] *Ibid.*, XXIII, pp.353-54.

Ever since this observation of Altekar the idea of Kumāragupta's abdication has caught the imagination of various scholars like B.P. Sinha, S.K. Maity and others. They have woven a web around it in an effort to prove their point and every thread of information has been pressed into service inspite of some very cogent dissent. Thus, B.P. Sinha[18] has referred to two stories contained in the *Kathāsaritsāgara* of Somadeva and a Buddhist work *Chandragarbhaparipṛchchhā*. According to the first story there was a king Mahendrāditya who had a valiant son Vikramāditya. This Vikramāditya defeated the Mlechchhas who were creating havoc on the earth. Thereafter Mahendrāditya handed over the kingdom to his son and himself retired to Vārāṇasī alongwith his wife and ministers. The second story contained in the *Chandragarbhaparipṛchchhā* is somewhat similar. It tells that the kingdom of one Mahendrasena was invaded by Yavanas, Pahlikas and Śakunas. Prince Duḥprasahahasta, son of Mahendrasena, defeated these enemies. On his return, Mahendrasena crowned his son as king and himself retired to religious life.[19] Sinha traces kernel of historical truth in both these stories. He identifies Mahendrāditya and Mahendrasena with Kumāragupta I and Vikramāditya and Duḥprasahahasta with Skandagupta and argues that since the Hūṇas are known to have invaded the Gupta empire in the last days of Kumāragupta's reign and were defeated by Skandagupta, they should be identified with the Mlechchhas, Yavanas, Pahlikas and Śakunas of these stories which according to the learned scholar are corroborated by the evidence of the Apratigha type of coins. He has been followed by S.K. Maity[20] and S.R. Goyal[21] both of whom have advanced almost the same arguments as those of B.P. Sinha.

These arguments appear to be very forceful and seem to prove that Kumāragupta I had abdicated in favour of his son Skandagupta. This idea had been given by A.S. Altekar as a mere hypothesis and as just one of the possible interpretations of the Apratigha type of coins. But Sinha, Goyal and Maity have given it the status of an established theory. However, a critical analysis of the numismatic and epigraphical evidence at our disposal reveals an altogether different story, thus making it necessary to give up the whole theory of Kumāragupta's abdication.

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[17] *Catalogue of the Gupta Gold Coins in the Bayana Hoard*, p.cxii.

[18] *JNSI*, XVI, pp.210-14.

[19] The idea was first mooted by K.P. Jayaswal in his *Imperial History of India*, pp.36-37.

[20] *The Imperial Guptas and Their Times*, pp.56-58. The view has been recently reiterated by him in his Presidential Address to the 74th Annual Conference of the Numismatic Society of India, *JNSI*, XLIX, p.11.

[21] *A History of the Imperial Guptas*, pp.268-70.

Both the stories contained in the above-mentioned works have no independent historical value. They may be having an echo of some long forgotten episodes of the Gupta period but can not be accepted as the sober facts of the Gupta history unless proved otherwise by the evidence from other sources. In the story contained in the *Kathāsaritsāgara,* Vikramāditya is said to have destroyed all the barbarian tribes such as the Kāmbojas, Yavanas, Hūṇas, Tokharians and Persians. Though Skandagupta is known to have defeated the Hūṇas, from the epigraphical sources, one can not equate this single foreign people with the Kāmbojas, Yavanas, Tokharians and Persians. In fact, the question of any Persian invasion of India at this time does not arise as the very existence of the Sassanian empire was endangered by the repeated invasions of the Epthalites who inflicted a crushing defeat upon the Persian emperor Yazdigird in 454 A.D. As for the Greeks or the Yavanas, they had lost Bactria to the barbarians centuries ago and were nowhere of any count at this time either as a political power or as mercenaries. Likewise, there are some important discrepancies between the account given in the *Chandragarbhaparipṛchchhā* and the known facts of the history of Gupta period. Mahendrasena is said to be a king of Kauśāmbī which was never the capital of the Guptas nor were there any Pahlavas, Yavanas and Śakunas on the borders of the Gupta empire who could threaten an invasion of India at this time. In fact the very identity of the Śakunas with any known tribes is problematic.

Coming to the interpretation of the Apratigha type of coins, there are some very serious objections which go against the theory of abdication of throne by Kumāragupta I. It is quite pertinent to ask if Kumāragupta had abdicated the throne who issued these coins? It could not have been Kumāragupta as he must have lost all imperial rights to issue any state currency as soon as he renounced the throne.[22] As an alternative one may try to explain these coins as commemorative issues of his successor but that also is ruled out, because notwithstanding the fact that there was no numismatic tradition amongst the Gupta rulers to issue commemorative coins, it is to be noted that had these been the issues of Skandagupta, he would have definitely given his own name on these coins as commemorator. Moreover, the place where the name of Kumāragupta is mentioned on the obverse, is always reserved for the name of the issuer on the Gupta coins.

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[22] M.C. Joshi has argued in his article on Apratigha coins in the *JNSI*, XXI, pp.34-36, that Kumāragupta had given up active role in the state and was no longer taking any interest in the military and political affairs of the empire and that the crown-prince had become a *de facto* ruler. But there was no scope for such an arrangement in the political institutions of the Gupta period, as the idea of *dvairājya* has always been alien to Indians.

In order to prove their point, the propounders of the theory of abdication try to argue that the scene on these coins merely shows that Kumāragupta was contemplating renunciation but had not actually abdicated as yet and his queen and the crown-prince are shown trying to dissuade him from his resolve. It must be remembered in this regard that even if there was any such controversy in the royal family, it was definitely not a thing to be depicted on the coins which were meant for circulation in public. Rather it would have been kept as a closely guarded secret of the state.[23]

No attention has been given to the weight standard of the Apratigha type of coins which has an important bearing on this problem. The coin in the collection of the British Museum weighs only 115 grains[24] and those from the Bayana hoard weigh between 120.5 and 123 grains,[25] which is the lowest in the series of Kumāragupta's gold coins except for a few specimens of the Archer type.[26] Considering the fact that there was a gradual increase in the weight of the Gupta gold coins till the time of Skandagupta, the Apratigha type of coins have to be the earliest issues of Kumāragupta I. This knocks out the very bottom of the theory of his abdication.

In fact, the advocates of this theory have not paid attention to the fact that there was no time-gap between the reigns of Kumāragupta I and Skandagupta for the former to renounce the throne and hand over the authority to the latter, nor the political situation at that time warranted any such action on the part of the Gupta emperor. The last known date of Kumāragupta I is the Gupta year 135 found on his silver coins[27] which means that he was ruling with full imperial authority till atleast 454 A.D. On the other hand, the Junagadh Rock inscription of Skandagupta shows that by August, 455 (*Praushṭhapada*, 136),[28] the latter was not only on the Gupta throne but had already defeated his enemies and reorganised the state administration by appointing suitable provincial officers after a prolonged deliberation on the subject.[29] Thus, within the short period between 454 A.D. and August, 455 we are asked to believe that Kumāragupta laid down the sceptre, Skandagupta ascended the throne, defeated his enemies such as the Hūṇas and the Pushyamitras and also reorganised the administration, which in all reasonableness looks to be impossible and is strongly contradicted by definite epigraphical evidence.

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[23] *Cf.* Gupta, P.L., *Gupta Sāmrājya*, pp.312-13.

[24] *CCGD, BM*, p.87.

[25] *Bayana Hoard*, pp.304-06.

[26] The gradual increase in the metrology of the Gupta gold coins is evident from the following sequence of their weight standard: Chandragupta I—110.7 to 123 grains, Samudragupta—111 to 123.8 grains, Chandragupta II—114 to 126.8 grains, Kumāragupta I—116 to 129 grains and Skandagupta—128 to 142.8 grains. *Cf. CCGD, BM* and *Bayana Hoard*.

The Bhitari pillar inscription provides clear evidence that Kumāragupta I had already died by the time Skandagupta returned home after defeating his enemies. In the verse 6 of this inscription we are told—

Pitari divamupete viplutāṁ vaṅśa-Lakshmīṁ bhuja-bala-vijit-ārir=yyaḥ pratishṭhāpya bhūyaḥ/
jitāṁ=iti paritoshān=mātaraṁ sāsra-nettrāṁ hata-ripur=iva Kṛshṇo Devakīm=abhyupetaḥ// [30]

i.e. "Who had vanquished his enemies by the valour of his arms, when his father had reached the heaven, having firmly established the royal fortune of his dynasty—which had been ravished, Skandagupta then approached his mother who had tears in her eyes on account of the complete satisfaction that victory had been attained, just as Kṛshṇa who had slain his enemies, approached Devakī."

This explicit statement that Skandagupta conveyed the news of the victory to his mother, when his father had ascended to the heaven, completely demolishes the credibility of the stories contained in the *Kathāsaritsāgara* and the *Chandragarbhaparipṛchchhā*. It leaves no room for the conjecture that Kumāragupta I abdicated the throne in favour of his son and retired to Vārāṇasī after the victory of Skandagupta over the Hūṇas. He was simply no more on this earth to receive the happy news of his son's achievements. Otherwise, Skandagupta, who has been described as *pitṛ-parigata-pāda-padma-vartti*[31]—a constant attendant on the feet of his father—would have certainly broken the news first to his father, rather than rush to somebody else.

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[27] *CCGD, BM*, p.107, plate XVIII. 1.
[28] Bhandarkar, D.R. (ed.), *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, III (1981), p.301.
[29] *Ibid.*, pp.299-300.
[30] *Ibid.*, p.315.
[31] *Ibid.*, line 7.

As the Bhitari pillar inscription is an undated record some skeptic mind may question the date of the event referred to in the verse discussed above. But the seal of finality is set on the whole problem by a reference in the Junagadh rock inscription which is dated in *Praushṭhapada* 136 G.E. =August 455 A.D. The verse three of this inscription runs as-

Nṛpati-guṇa-niketaḥ Skandaguptaḥ pṛthu-śrīḥ chaturudadhi-jalāntāṁ sphīta-paryanta-deśāṁ/
avanim=avanat=ārir=yaḥ chakār=ātma-saṁsthāṁ pitari sura-sakhitvaṁ prāptavaty=ātma-śaktyā//[32]

i.e. 'Skandagupta, the abode of royal virtues of expansive splendour, who had subdued his enemies, by means of his valour made subject to himself, when his father has obtained the friendship of the gods (i.e. had died), the (entire) earth bounded by the waters of the four oceans and having prosperous frontier provinces.'[33]

It is clear from this verse that by August 455 A.D. Skandagupta had not only subdued his enemies but had also firmly established his fame in all directions including the frontier provinces and that his father Kumāragupta I had died before this date.

Thus, the information provided by the epigraphical evidence irrefutably establishes that the Gupta empire was invaded by the barbarian Hūṇas and the Pushyamitras in the last days of the reign of Kumāragupta I. Skandagupta was deputed to defeat these enemies, a task which he accomplished successfully. But by the time he returned, victorious from the battle-field, Kumāragupta had died. Skandagupta then ascended the throne sometime in 454-55 A.D. There was no time in this rapid sequence of events and this hour of national calamity for Kumāragupta to have even thought of abdicating the throne.

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[32] *Ibid.*, p.299.

[33] Translation by Professor Jagannath Agrawal.

12

The Age of Vikramādityas

D.C. Shukla

Vikramāditya, the greatest and the most remembered royal hero of Indian legends and folklore,[1] is said to have belonged to the Mālava tribe which occupied the Jaipur-Tonk-Ajmer-Mewar region in the first century B.C. There are numerous stories in Sanskrit, Prakrit and modern Indian languages, concerning his life and achievements, all characterised by exaggeration regarding the qualities of head and heart of this ideal king. They tell us about his generosity, courage, gallantry, magical powers, love for the brave, patronage of learning, excellence in spontaneous literary compositions and in evaluating the works of others.[2] Tradition has also depicted him as a worker of miracles, a champion of the weak and oppressed, an avenger of insult to womanhood and an incarnation of courage and daring.[3]

The most important of his (factual) achievements as described in literature are these: He conquered the whole earth, i.e. India and the adjoining countries including Iran, Ceylon and South-East Asia.[4] He was a patron of learning and his court was graced by the famous *navaratnas* (nine jewels), viz. Dhanvantrī, Kshapaṇaka, Amarasiṁha, Śaṅku, Vetālabhaṭṭa, Ghaṭakarpara, Kālidāsa, Varāhamihira, and Vararuchi.[5] He initiated the Vikrama Saṁvat,[6] and exterminated the Śakas which is illustrated by his epithet Śakāri or Śakadvisha.[7]

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[1] Sircar, D.C., *Ancient Malwa and the Vikramāditya Tradition*, Delhi, 1969 (hereafter abbreviated as *Ancient Malwa*), p.106; cf. H.C. Raychaudhuri in the *Vikrama Volume*, Ujjain, 1948, pp.483ff.

[2] Sircar, *op.cit.*, p.106. For the analysis of these qualities and achievements, vide, *Vikrama Volume*, pp.162ff. and other relevant articles given in this work; also Pandey, R.B. *Vikramāditya (Saṁvat-Pravartaka)*, Varanasi, 1960, pp.83ff. and pp.224ff.

[3] Sircar, *op.cit.*, p.107.

[4] *Ibid.*, p.110.

[5] *Ibid.*, pp.120-21; cf. *Vikrama Volume*, pp.71-114.

[6] For a detailed account vide *Vikrama Volume*, pp.1-19, 57-69, 115-36, 289-302, 557-86; Sircar, D.C., *Indian Epigraphy*, Delhi, 1965, pp.219 ff.; *A History and Culture of the Indian poeple*, Vol.II, *The Age of Imperial Unity*, 3rd Imp., Bombay, 1965, pp.124ff.; *Ancient Malwa*, pp.140ff.

[7] Pandey, R.B., *op.cit.*, pp.88ff.

In this regard many questions arise: was this king, so lionised by the Indian people, a historical personage or merely a figment of popular imagination? If he was not a historical figure, then how did these legends originate? If his historicity is to be believed, then when did he flourish? According to one school of historians there is no reason to doubt the existence of such a ruler and as the era said to have been founded by him commenced in 57 B.C. he should be placed in the middle of the first century B.C. According to their reasoning the traditional account regarding his reign should be accepted unless there is positive evidence to the contrary. The late Dr. R.B. Pandey,[8] who championed this view has given a detailed picture of the life and times of Vikramāditya on the basis of literary sources of diverse nature. He has accepted almost every fact recorded by tradition as authentic including the supposed contemporaneity of Vikramāditya with the famous nine gems and also the creation of a pan-Indian empire by him in the first century B.C. But the history of India even in the first century A.D. as known from inscriptions and coins, precludes any possibility of the existence of such an empire in that period. Consequently, a large number of scholars including R.C. Majumdar,[9] A.S. Altekar,[10] H.C. Raychaudhuri,[11] R.K. Mookerji,[12] D.C. Sircar,[13] and S.R. Goyal[14] do not believe in the historicity of this king. They support the view that Vikramāditya, the supposed founder of the Vikrama era, is merely a legend which originated and evolved due to the achievements and personality of Chandragupta II Vikdramāditya of the imperial Gupta dynasty.

Some of these scholars also believe that the accomplishments of several successors of Chandragupta II also contributed to the evolution of the Vikramāditya legend. However, many other scholars, who do not believe in the traditional view, try to identify the original Vikramāditya either in the personality of Kṛta (the supposed Mālava chief)[15] or Gautamīputra Śātakarṇi[16] or some other ancient Indian ruler of the pre-

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[8] *Vikramāditya (Saṁvat-Pravartaka).*

[9] *Vikrama Volume*, pp.289ff.

[10] *Ibid.*, pp.1ff.

[11] *Ibid.*, pp.483ff.

[12] *Ibid.*, Intro., pp.i-xxviii; pp.323ff.

[13] *Ancient Malwa*, pp.106ff.

[14] *A History of the Imperial Guptas*, pp.248ff.

[15] Altekar, A.S., in the *Vikrama Volume*, pp.1ff.

[16] Jayaswal, K.P., quoted by R.K. Mookerji in the *Vikrama Volume*, pp.xiii-xiv.

Gupta age. Now the question is: which of these alternatives is correct. As is well-known much of our ancient history is found in the form of legends. Some times these legends are based on actual history, at others even the germs of actual happenings are completely missing. As our ancients were very credulous, they did not hesitate in amplifying and elaborating their legends with the help of supernatural elements. For example, the legend of Chāṇakya and Chandragupta Maurya, now called *Chāṇakya-Chandragupta Kathā*, seems to have been based on some historical facts, but was later on very much enlarged. Therefore, in the study of *Vikrama Kathā* one should be on one's guard when one tries to find out the actual grains of truth in it.

It is obvious that the veracity of the Vikramāditya legend in its present form is an impossibility. Such a ruler simply could not exist, as the complex nature of his personality and achievements make him out to be. On the one hand he is described as the republican chief of the Mālava tribe; on the other, tradition ascribes to him universal kingship. Such a phenomenon was impossible in ancient Indian polity. Even outside India there are extremely few cases in which a republic is known to have succeeded in establishing an empire. Being ruled by the people themselves, republics could not maintain their hold over the subject people. Such a thing was possible only in monarchical or imperial polity. The Roman Republic no doubt succeeded in doing so, but that was the result of its unique historical circumstances and political development spreading over several centuries. Similarly, the success of the Athenian democracy in founding an empire for a short duration was also the result of some very special circumstances, viz. the transformation of the Confederacy of Delos by trickery. We do not know of any other example in ancient world history in which a republic succeeded in creating an empire while Vikramāditya legend expects us to believe that the tiny Mālava republic of Avanti created a pan-Indian empire under the leadership of its hero Vikramāditya. Incidentally, it may also be noted that the Mālava republic, even in the third century A.D. was confined to the Mālavanagara of Rajasthan where its coins and inscriptions have been discovered. Contrary to this fact the *Vikrama Kathā* presumes that the Mālavas had already occupied Ujjayinī and that it was their capital as early as the first century B.C.

Let us examine some other statements contained in the Vikramāditya legend. Traditionally, the king Vikramāditya is described as an ideal person and an ideal ruler. He is the embodiment of all virtues. He never shrank from charity to the needy, nor from battle against his enemies. He gave away freely what had been won by courage and endurance. He used his courage for the protection of Dharma and for the destruction of all those who did not tread the path of Dharma. His patronage of learning and love for Sanskrit language and literature have become proverbial. Nine gems who flourished at his court include talents of all type, such as poets, lexicographers, physicians, astronomers and grammarians. In later periods kings and chieftains of India who collected round themselves a group of learned men and poets were compared on that account with Vikramātidya. The great hero is himself depicted as an accomplished poet and writer. Several anthologies (for instance the *Subhāshitāvalī* of Vallabhadeva, *Śārṅgadharapaddhati*, *Vidyākarasahasrakam* of Vidyākaramiśra and the *Sadūktikarṇāmṛta* of Śrīdharadāsa), which have come down to us from the past, contain numerous verses attributed to Vikramāditya. A work on Dhanurveda and a lexicographical work named *Saṁsārāvarta* have also been attributed to him.

A large number of stories are also current which describe Vikramāditya's gallantry, romantic nature and association with *Vetāla Sādhanā*. He is said to have succeeded in acquiring all the great qualities and their attributes, viz. Aṇimā (Minuteness), Mahimā (Greatness), Laghimā (Lightness), Garimā (Heaviness), Prāpti (Acquisition), Īśitā (Supermacy), Vaśitā (Dominion) and Prākāmya (Irresistible will) through *Vetāla Sādhanā*.[17] It seems that here either the virtues of several kings have been combined in the personality of this ideal hero or it is an altogether imaginary picture of what an ideal king should be. An analysis of the achievements and personality of each of the historical Vikramādityas, i.e. the Vikramādityas of the Gupta age, suggests that probably the first suggestion is the correct one.

The imperial Guptas were the earliest kings to assume the title Vikramāditya. About half a dozen of the Gupta rulers are known to have adopted this *biruda*. On this basis the Gupta age is sometimes called "the Age of Vikramādityas". Till a few decades ago Chandragupta II was supposed to have been the earliest king to have assumed this title. But now we have at least one coin of Samudragupta also, found in the Bamnala hoard, on the reverse of which this ruler is given the title "Śrī Vikrama" instead of his usual *biruda* Parākramāṅka.

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[17] *Vikrama Volume*, p.170.

According to Diskalkar[18] and Altekar[19] and following them many other scholars,[20] this coin was struck during the early reign of Chandragupta II: the old die for the obverse of the coins of Samudragupta being used instead of the die of Chandragupta II's early coin of the "Archer Type". But as shown by S.R. Goyal[21] this theory is totally unwarranted. The scepticism of Diskalkar and Altekar emanates from the singleness of this coin. They also argue that the Gupta kings usually adopted one *biruda* only. But both these arguments are fallacious. It is one of the fundamental principles of numismatic studies that the evidence of a type, even if it is known only by one coin, should be accepted unless its acceptance is not in consonance with the definitely known facts of history. The solitary coin of Garuḍadhvaja variety of Kācha[22] and the solitary specimen of the Gaḍahara coin containing the name "Samudra"[23] provide interestingly close and similar examples. It is also wrong to assume that no Gupta king is known to have used more than one *biruda*. As pointed out by Goyal, Skandagupta assumed two *birudas*, i.e. Vikramāditya and Kramāditya which, according to Altekar himself, meant two different things.[24] Therefore, there is no valid reason to doubt that Samudragupta also assumed two *birudas*, i.e. Parākrama and Vikrama.[25]

Thus, Samudragupta becomes the first Indian king to assume the title Vikrama. Here, it may be pointed out that his usual title Parākramāṅka is a synonym of Vikramāditya or Vikramāṅka. Following Samudragupta, his son Chandragupta II, who is known to history as Sāhasāṅka also, which is a synonym of Vikramāditya, latter's grandson Skandagupta (and probably Purugupta also), Purugupta's son Budhagupta and another Gupta king of unknown parentage, Chandragupta III,[26] assumed this title. Thus, from c. 350 A.D. to c. 500 A.D. north India was ruled by a dynasty whose kings became famous as Vikramādityas. With the passage of time separate entity of such rulers could easily be forgotten. In an age in which scientific history was unknown and much of the past was remembered in the form of legends only, such a phenomenon was not impossible. In such a situation if we find that most of the elements of the Vikramāditya legend may easily be traced in the lives, achievements and personalities of the Vikramādityas of the Gupta age, the possiblity of the above hypothesis being correct should be seriously investigated.

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[18] *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India*, V, Pt.II, pp.135ff.

[19] *The Coinage of the Gupta Empire*, Banaras, 1957, pp.44-45.

[20] Chatterjee, C.D., *Journal of the U.P. Historical Society*, II, p.23.

[21] *JNSI*, XXVII, Pt. II, 1965, pp.142-43.

[22] Altekar, *op.cit.*, p.87.

[23] *Ibid.*, p.52.

[24] *Ibid.*, p.256.

[25] *JNSI*, XXVII, Pt. II, 1965, pp.142-43.

[26] Goyal, *op.cit.*, p.372.

Let us begin with Samudragupta. The greatest contribution of Samudragupta to the origin and evolution of the Vikramāditya legend belongs to the field of wars and conquests. The detailed description of the *digvijaya* (world-wide conquest) of Vikramāditya as found in the *Kathāsaritsāgara*, *Bṛhatkathāmañjarī* and several other medieval works[27] reminds one of the conquests of Samudragupta. In fact, in the whole annals of ancient Indian history, barring Chandragupta Maurya, who obviously could not have anything to do with the legendary Vikramāditya, it is only Samudragupta whose conquests resemble the conquests of "Vikramāditya'. Though the description of the conquests of Vikramāditya as found in the early medieval works has become somewhat confused and stereotyped, there are several passages which cannot fail to remind any impartial historian, of almost identical though briefer, passages of the Prayāga *praśasti* of Samudragupta.[28] For example, in the *Kathāsaritsāgara* at one place Vikramāditya is addressed thus:

"You have conquered southern and western regions, Madhyadeśa, Saurāshṭra and the regions to the east of the Gaṅgā. The northern regions and Kashmir have become your tributory states. Various forts and islands have been conquered, the great hoards of the Mlechchhas have been destroyed and other kings have submitted".[29] If it is an idealised description of the actual conquests of a historical king then it is only Samudragupta to whom these conquests can be attributed. Here, the mention of the conquest of various islands by Vikramāditya may be specially noted. It reminds us of the *sarvvadvīpa vasibhiḥ*, etc. of the Prayāga *praśasti*. In the same work it is said that the kings of Gauḍa, Karṇāṭaka, Lāṭa, Kashmir, Sindhu and Iran presented themselves to Vikramāditya,[30] *i.e.* they followed the policy of *ātmanivedana*.[31] Here, the reference to the submission of the emperor of Iran may be easily compared with the *ātmanivedana* of the *Shāhānushāhi* (i.e. the king of Iran) to Samudragupta. The *Kathāsaritsāgara* also refers to the presentation of his daughter by the king of Ceylon to Vikramāditya[32] which is quite similar to the policy of *kanyopāyanadāna*[33] followed by foreign rulers, including the king of Ceylon, to please the Gupta emperor.

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[27] Cf. Pandey, *op.cit.*, pp.12ff.

[28] Sircar, D.C., *Select Inscriptions Bearing on Indian History and Civilization*, Vol.I (*SI*), 2nd ed., Calcutta, 1965, pp.262ff.

[29] 23, 1, 76-78, as quoted by Pandey, *op.cit.*, App.3, pp.250-51.

[30] Pandey, *op.cit.*, p.99.

[31] Sircar, *SI*, p.266 and n.1.

Thus, the legends regarding the conquests of Vikramāditya and the establishment of an empire by him might have originated from the actual conquests of Samudragupta, though later writers gave an idealised description of them. Similarly, many other elements of the Vikrama tradition may be connected with Samudragupta. The Eran Stone Pillar Inscription[34] refers to his *suvarṇadāna* or the gift of gold to the Brāhmaṇas. The Prayāga *praśasti* also describes him as a very kind-hearted and generous ruler who was devoted to the betterment of the poor and the destitutes.[35] His Nālandā[36] and Gayā[37] Copper Plate inscriptions, of which we possess only later copies,[38] and also the inscriptions of his successors refer to the gift of gold coins and cows which were earned by him in accordance with *nyāya*.[39] It is, therefore, quite possible that the stories regarding the generosity of the legendary Vikramaditya originated with the actual deeds of Samudragupta in this field. Here it may also be mentioned that Samudragupta has been described as the overlord of the Śakas and Ujjayinī, the capital of Malwa, was included in his empire.[40] He was also famous as a great patron of learning and literature. His court was graced by Harisheṇa, Vasu-bandhu the Elder,[41] Siddhasena Divākara[42] and also most probably by Kālidāsa.[43]

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[32] Pandey, *op.cit.*, p.99.

[33] Sircar, *SI*, p.266.

[34] *Ibid.*, pp.269-70.

[35] Sircar, *op. cit.*, pp. 266-67.

[36] *Ibid.*, pp.271ff.

[37] *Ibid.*, pp.273ff.

[38] Goyal, *op.cit.*, pp.111ff.

[39] Sircar, *SI*, p.321.

[40] According to a tradition prince Chandragupta II passed the Kāvyakāra examination in this city.

[41] Goyal, *op.cit.*, p.126f., pp.214ff.

[42] *Vikrama Volume*, pp.213-80.

[43] Goyal, *op.cit.*, pp.217ff. It is generally believed that Kālidāsa flourished in the Gupta age. Most of the scholars who hold this view place the period of the poet's creative activity in the first half of the fifth century A.D. and suggest that he was patronised by Chandragupta II and Kumāragupta I. But Goyal has almost conclusively shown that Kālidāsa flourished in the second half of fourth century A.D. and graced the courts of Samudragupta and Chandragupta II.

Samudragupta was succeeded by his elder son Rāmagupta who was overthrown by his younger brother Chandragupta II. There are a number of elements in the Vikrama legend which may be traced in the achievements and personality of Chandragupta II.[44] The most important of them is the extermination of the Śaka kingdom of western India by him, a fact which is known mainly with the help of numismatic evidence.[45] His association with Ujjayinī, the capital of the legendary Vikramāditya, is revealed by some early medieval inscriptions and literary works in which he is described as the 'lord of the great city of Ujjayinī'.[46] The discovery of the drama *Devīchandragupta* of Viśākhadatta has brought to light a very significant fact which may easily be connected with the evolution of the Vikramāditya saga. In one of the available extracts of this drama it is said that when Chandragupta was thinking over the various possible means of destroying the Śaka king, who besieged the Gupta camp, he contemplated over the possibility of *Vetāla-Sādhanā* (goblin-worship) also, because he thought that with the help of a *Vetāla* the Mlechchha king could easily be killed. This fact has been alluded to in the Rāshṭrakūṭa inscriptions also.[47] Chandragupta's faith in the efficacy of *Vetāla-Sādhanā* could have been the original source of the cycle of the legends which culminated in the stories found in the *Vetālapañchaviṅśati*. Thus, a very important element of the *Vikrama Kathā* is directly traceable in the personality and achievements of Chandragupta II Vikramāditya. The fact that Chandragupta II was the patron of Kālidāsa is also generally admitted by a large number of Indologists; it needs no repetition.

There are two other elements of the Vikrama legend which might have originated from the personality of Chandragupta II. Vikramāditya has been described as a great lover and a husband of a large number of queens, many of whom were won by him by his valour.[48] We also know that like his father Samudragupta, (who is said to have won the hand of Dattadevī, the mother of Chandragupta II, by paying the price of his personal valour, an additional point of similarity between the personality of Samudragupta and the legendary Vikramāditya),[49] Chandragupta II was also a great lover and a husband of several queens. One of his queen known from the Vākāṭaka epigraphs was Kuberanāgā, a Nāga princess.[50] It is interesting to note that the *Bṛhatkathāmañjarī* also mentions that Vikramāditya married a Nāga princess.[51] Another queen of Chandragupta II was Dhruvadevī who was, it may be noted, about 15 years junior to Kuberanāgā and yet was installed as Mahādevī by him. According to S.R. Goyal, Chandragupta II was middle aged at the time when he married Dhruvadevī, the wife of his elder brother Rāmagupta, whom he murdered for the sake of Dhruvadevī and the kingdom.[52] He was very much under the influence of her beauty, so much so that she was entrusted with the administration of a province, a privilege not known to have been accorded to any other Gupta queen.[53] Further, it was her son who became the successor of Chandragupta II overriding the claims of the sons of Kuberanāgā.[54] Chandragupta II is also not known to have devoted any attention to the expansion of his empire; he only defeated the Śakas of Western India. The fact that he had a romantic nature is also recorded by Viśākhadatta, the author of the *Devīchandragupta*, who gives a detailed description of the amorous relationship of Chandragupta II with a maid-servant named Mādhavasenā. It is also not beyond the bounds of probability that many of the princesses who were offered to the royal Gupta family in accordance with the *kanyopāyandāna* policy during the reign of Samudragupta were actually married to Chandragupta II.[55] Thus there are very good grounds to believe that romantic and amorous aspects of the personality of the legendary Vikramāditya owe their origin to the personality and character of Chandragupta II Vikramāditya.

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[44] For a detailed analysis vide, *Vikrama Volume*, pp.323-59, 483-511; Sircar, *Ancient Malwa*, pp.130ff.

[45] *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, Vol, III; *The Classical Age*, 2nd Imp., Bombay, 1962, pp.19ff; cf. Sircar, *op.cit.*, p.131, 145 n.7.

[46] Cf. Sircar, *op.cit.*, pp.139-45.

[47] *Epigrahia Indica*, VII, p.36; XVIII, p.248.

[48] Pandey, *op.cit.*, pp,79, 147; cf. *Vikrama Volume*, pp.173-75.

There is yet another aspect of the Vikramāditya saga which may be connected with Chandragupta II. According to legends Vikramāditya was the founder of Vikrama Saṁvat, the initial date of which is 57 B.C. We know that this era became associated with the name Vikrama only the ninth century A.D. The Dhaulpur inscription of Chaṇḍa Mahāsena dated 898 V.E.=841 A.D. is the first known document to use the name Vikrama for this era.[56] Between the fifth and the ninth centuries A.D. it was known as Mālava Saṁvat and earlier than that it was called the Kṛta era. Therefore, the association of the name Vikramāditya with this era could not have been due to its initiation by the king. Then how and why the name of Vikramāditya came to be associated with this reckoning? The answer is furnished by an interesting theory propounded by S.R. Goyal,[57] P.L. Gupta,[58] and S. Chattopadhyaya,[59] according to which Chandragupta II was the founder of the Gupta era, though he counted it from the date of the accession of his grandfather Chandragupta I.. Now, we may explain the association of the name of Vikramāditya with the Kṛta-Mālava era thus: Chandragupta II, who was closely associated with the Avanti region and the city of Ujjayinī became famous as the founder of an era, but in the late periods the people of Ujjayinī, who looked upon Vikramāditya, *i.e.* Chandragupta II as their own king, only remembered the initiation of an era by him though they forgot the identity of that era. In such a situation, it was natural for them to identify the era of Chandragupta Vikramāditya with their own tribal era *i.e.* the Kṛta-Mālava era. Thus, the name of Vikramāditya came to be associated with the ancient Kṛta-Mālava era. Once we concede such a possiblity there remains no need for placing the legendary Vikramāditya in the first century B.C.[60]

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[49] Eran Stone Pillar Ins., *SI*, p.269.

[50] Sircar, *SI*, pp.436-39.

[51] *Vikrama Volume*, p.175.

[52] Goyal, *op.cit.*, p.225.

[53] *Ibid.*, p.252, n.7.

[54] Samudragupta refers to a number of his grandsons in his Eran inscription (*SI*, pp.269-70) while Kumāragupta I, the son of Chandragupta II begotten on Dhruvadevī was obviously born after the murder of Rāmagupta which took place after the death of Samudragupta. Therefore Kumāragupta I could not have been the eldest son of Chandragupta II.

[55] According to the *Kathāsaritsāgara* a number of princesses were offered to him by the rulers defeated by his father. Madanalekhā, the Siṁhalese princess, was one of them.

The next Gupta king who assumed the title Vikramāditya was Skandagupta. That his personality has contributed much to the Vikrama legend becomes evident from the fact that he was the son of Kumāragupta Mahendrāditya, and in the *Kathāsaritsāgara* Vikramāditya has been described as the son of king Mahendrāditya.[61] Secondly, Skandagupta is famous for his victory over the Hūṇas or Mlechchhas, a fact that is also ascribed to the legendary Vikramāditya in the *Kathāsaritsāgara* and several other literary works.[62] The victory over the Hūṇas was one of the major achievements of the legendary Vikramāditya, and it is the name of Skandagupta which is explicitly associated with this achievement for the first time in the history of India,[63] though, as pointed out by Goyal, it is quite possible that this feat was achieved by Samudragupta also.[64]

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[56] *Vikrama Volume*, pp.3, 123, 582.

[57] Goyal, *op.cit.*

[58] *Journal of the Bihar Research Society*, XLII, March 56, pp.72ff., XLIX, Pt.I-IV, pp.74ff.

[59] *Early History of North India*, Calcutta, 1958, p.144.

[60] Cf. Goyal, *op.cit.*, p.249.

[61] *Vikrama Volume*, pp.125, 156, n.2; cf. Pandey, *op.cit.*, pp.72-76.

[62] Cf. Pandey, *op.cit.*, p.98.

Here, it will not be out of place to say a few words regarding the causes and processes of the merger of the personality of all these three Gupta emperors into the personality of an ideal king, namely Vikramāditya in the popular mind. In an age when history was more or less a matter of memory, people were bound to forget the separateness of the individualities of the three kings all of whom assumed the same title and many of whose achievements were similar. Samudragupta was an enemy of the Śakas and Chandragupta II was the destroyer of this foreign tribe; Skandagupta is known to have defeated the Hūṇas while the king Chandra of the Meharauli record, who has been satisfactorily identified by Goyal, and following him by numerous others, with Samudragupta,[65] defeated the Vāhlikas who were not different from the Hūṇas. In any case the Hūṇas certainly invaded Gandhāra some time before the visit of Fa-hien and were repulsed by the local king with the help of the Gupta emperor.[66] Thus, Skandagupta and one of his predecessors both defeated the Hūṇas. Kālidāsa graced the court of Samudragupta and Chandragupta II both. All these three kings were also associated with Ujjayinī. They were all nominated by their respective fathers to their ancestral throne.[67] Because of these common factors in their personalities and achievements, in the popular mind they were gradually moulded into one ideal king to whom all the achievements and virtues of these monarchs were ascribed. That explains the complex nature of the personality of Vikramāditya and that is how the Vikrama legend, the saga of the most popular Indian royal hero, originated.

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[63] *The Classical Age*, Bombay, 1962, p.27.

[64] Goyal, *op.cit.*, pp.168ff.

[65] *Ibid.*, pp.201ff. Cf. *King Chandra and the Meharauli Pillar*, ed. by M.C. Joshi, S.K. Gupta and Shankar Goyal, Meerut, 1989.

[66] *HIG*, pp.173ff.

[67] The facts that Samudragupta was nominated by Chandragupta I as his successor is recorded in the fourth verse of the Prayāga *praśasti* (*SI*, p.263). The nomination of Chandragupta II by Samudragupta has been mentioned in the Bhitari record of Skandagupta (*ibid.*, p.321), while the selection of the latter by his father Kumāragupta I is indicated by the *Kathāsaritsāgara* and the *Chandragarbhaparipṛchchhā*.

13

Hieun-Tsang on the Time of the Imperial Guptas

K.D. Sethna

Historians today start the Imperial Guptas in 320 A.D. and terminate them in c.570 A.D. Hiuen-Tsang travelled in India during 630-643 A.D. He thus came practically on the heels of the last Guptas. And yet, his sense of their time poses us a problem. The principal place where the problem emerges is in his account of "Bālāditya-rāja, king of Magadha."[1]

Bālāditya, to quote R.C. Majumdar,[2] "is mentioned...as a great patron of Buddhism and the builder of a great *saṅghārāma* at Nālandā." He is also described[3] as having defeated the terrible Mihirakula who is usually taken as a Hūṇa chief. Majumdar[4] continues: "An inscription found at Nālandā, and belonging to about the middle of the eighth century A.D., also refers to 'Bālāditya, the great king of irresistible valour' who, 'after having vanquished all the foes and enjoyed the entire earth, erected a great and extraordinary temple at Nālandā.' We need hardly doubt his identification with Bālāditya mentioned by Hiuen-Tsang." But there is another question connected with Bālāditya. Majumdar[5] speaks of a member of the Imperial Gupta line named Narsiṁhagupta who is currently dated to have reigned from about 500 A.D. and whose gold coins show that he assumed the title Bālāditya. Majumdar[6] thinks it very plausible that Narsiṁhagupta is the hero of Hiuen-Tsang as well as of the Nālandā inscription. What makes it certain that he was this hero is the lineage Hiuen-Tsang traces of his Bālāditya.

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[1] *A New History of the Indian People* (Lahore, 1943), Vol, VI, edited by R.C. Majumdar and A.S. Altekar, p.200.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp.192-93.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] *Ibid.*

In his account[7] Bālāditya was the great grandson of Śakrāditya who is credited by the Chinese pilgrim with the building of the earlier monastery of Nālandā. In between Śakrāditya and Bālāditya we get from Hiuen-Tsang Śakrāditya's son Buddhagupta, and Buddhagupta's son Tathāgatagupta. Budhagupta, son of Śakrāditya, must be identified with the historical Budhagupta, grandson of Kumāragupta I, especially as Kumāragupta's title Mahendrāditya includes, like Śakrāditya, a name of Indra.[8] So, even though historically one of the steps Hiuen-Tsang puts between Śakrāditya and Buddhagupta seems missing and even though the real Narasiṁhagupta seems to be a brother of Budhagupta[9] and not his grandson through some equivalent of Hiuen-Tsang's Tathāgatagupta, we may be sure that the Chinese pilgrim had the Imperial Guptas in mind in connection with his Bālāditya.

However, he makes two startling statements. Majumdar,[10] touching again on the defeat of Mihirakula by Bālāditya, writes: "...the most important point to be noted is that Hiuen-Tsang places this defeat 'some centuries ago', *i.e.*, several hundred years before c.633 A.D., when he visited Śākala. This is hardly compatible with the view that the incident referred to took place about 530 A.D."

Yes, it is hardly compatible with the current chronology, but it would be quite right if we subscribe to the theory, derivable from the traditional Indian chronology connected with the Purāṇas that the Sandrocottus of the Greek historians of Alexander's Indian campaign was not Chandragupta Maurya, as our historians hold, but Chandragupta I, founder of the Imperial Guptas. For, then the Guptas would commence in the last quarter of the fourth century B.C. and Narsiṁhagupta Bālāditya's defeat of Mihirakula, which is now placed about 210 years after 320 A.D., would come the identical number of years after the accession of Sandrocottus at Palibothra (Pāṭaliputra) in some year between 325 and 315 B.C.: that is, the defeat would fall in the period from (325-210=)115 to (315-210=)105 B.C. The incident would then certainly be "some centuries ago" in relation to Hiuen-Tsang's visit to Mihirakula's capital Śākala in c.633 A.D. And what is especially interesting and significant here is Majumdar's admission[11] *vis-à-vis* the view that Mihirakula was defeated about 530 A.D. : "As Watters has pointed out, other Chinese authorities also seem to place Mihirakula long before that date."

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[7] S.N., Sen, *India through Chinese Eyes* (University of Madras, 1956), pp.135-39, 162.

[8] Raychaudhuri, *The Political History of Ancient India* (Calcutta University, 1950), p.325.

[9] *A New History of the Indian People*, VI, p.185.

[10] *Ibid.*, pp.196-97.

How persistent is Hiuen-Tsang's idea of a B.C. date for the Imperial Guptas can be seen from his next "bombshell"—about Bālāditya's great grandfather Śakrāditya whom we have equated with Kumāragupta I, the great grandson of Chandragupta I. Hiuen-Tsang says that Śakrāditya built the earlier Nālandā monastery "soon after" (in Watters's translation[12]) or "not long after" (in Beal's[13]) the Nirvāṇa of Buddha. So we may conclude that Hiuen-Tsang believed Buddha's death to have shortly preceded the rise of the Imperial Guptas. And, as none of the four dates he[14] reports as prevalent in his time about the number of years elapsed since the Nirvāṇa—(1) 1,500, (2) 1,300, (3) 1,200, (4) 900—puts the event after Christ, he must have dated the Guptas fairly earlier than the period starting from 320 A.D.

Of course, the belief that the Imperial Guptas succeeded shortly after the death of Buddha may strike us as a gross mistake, but, even so, it should drive home to us with some finality Hiuen-Tsang's sense of their antiquity.

And it is not possible to discredit his sense simply by arguing that, just as he was wrong to place Buddha's death shortly before Kumāragupta I, he must be wrong to place the defeat of Mihirakula by Kumāragupta's grandson some centuries earlier than c.633 A.D. The first dating is confined to Hiuen-Tsang, whereas the second is the consensus of Chinese authorities.

And even the first is not as egregious as it seems. In fact, Hiuen-Tsang's words, understood in all their special association, need be no mistake at all. To begin with: he estimated, in conformity with the Nepalese tradition of the *Divyāvadāna*, the interval between Buddha's death and Aśoka's accession to be 100 years.[15] And surely, for Hiuen-Tsang, Śakrāditya did not precede Aśoka. Hence, "soon after" or "not long after" must mean an interval of at least 100 years plus the length of Aśoka's reign. Then there is the question of Aśoka's successors. The earlier Chinese traveller Fa-hien (c.400-411 A.D.) distinctly mentions a son of Aśoka as the viceroy of Gandhāra.[16] Thus, for the Chinese the dynasty of Aśoka did not end with him. And, as the *Divyāvadāna*[17] speaks of his grandson Sampadi succeeding him and having as lineal successors Bṛhaspati, Vṛshasena, Pushyadharman and Pushyamitra, we may assume that Hiuen-Tsang considered the whole Maurya dynasty of several members, if not any other dynasty, to have preceded the Guptas. This would mean altogether more than a couple of centuries as the real substance of his "soon after" or "not long after."

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[11] *Ibid.*, p. 197.

[12] II, p.164.

[13] II, p.168.

[14] Watters, II, p.28.

[15] Beal, II, p.85.

But how could he put such substance into words normally meaning much less? He could do so if the intention of his words was comparative and not absolute. A still greater span of time could also be covered by that intention. And it would be quite rational to take as terms of comparison the time from Buddha's death to Śakrāditya's reign and the time from Buddha's death to the duration of Hiuen-Tsang's stay in India. "Soon after" or "not long after" should mean anything appreciably less than the number of years from Buddha's death to Hiuen-Tsang's Indian sojourn of c.630-643 A.D.

Thus, out of the four numbers, if we select 1,500 years, we reach for Buddha's death a date during c.870-857 B.C. Then, will not even six or seven centuries from it be a short time compared to the time between it and Hiuen-Tsang's sojourn? Actually, Kumāragupta I (Śakrāditya) became king between the 92nd and the 96th year[18]—say, the 94th—after the accession of Chandragupta I. With the latter situated by us somewhere in 325-315 B.C., Kumāragupta comes at some point in c.231-222 B.C. This date would be about 640 years after a Nirvāṇa dated between 870 and 857 B.C. About 640 years can with reason be considered "soon after" or "not long after" in comparison to Hiuen-Tsang's own time which would be 1,500 years later and consequently "not soon after' or "long after".

In passing, we may note that Beal holds Hiuen-Tsang himself to have actually put the Nirvāṇa 1,500 years before his own time. The Chinaman[19] says of "Manoratha, a master of Śāstras": "This learned doctor flourished in the midst of the thousand years after the *Nirvāṇa* of Buddha." And Beal[20] gives the footnote: "This expression, 'in the midst of, or during the thousand years' had a particular reference to the period of 1000 years which succeeded the period of 500 years after Buddha's death. The 500 years is called the period of the 'true law', the 1000 years 'the period of images', *i.e.* 'image-worship'; after that came the period of 'no law'. The phrase 'during the 1000 years', therefore, in these records, means that the person referred to lived during the middle portion of the second period, that is, about a thousand years after Buddha. There is a useful note in Wong Pūh's Life of Buddha (§204, *JRAS*, Vol. XX, p.215) relating to this point, from which it appears that the accepted date of the *Nirvāṇa* in China at this time was 850 B.C. The period of 1000 years, therefore, would extend from 350 B.C. to 650 A.D. Wong Pūh uses the expression *ke-shi* 'the latter age', for 'the thousand years."

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[16] Barua, B.M., *Aśoka and His Inscriptions* (Calcutta, 1946), Part I, p.56.

[17] *Ibid.*, p.55.

[18] Majumdar, *op.cit.*, p.172.

[19] Beal, pp.105-06.

[20] *Ibid.*, p.106. n.80.

Thus, from all points of view, Hiuen-Tsang points towards the identification of Sandrocottus with Chandragupta I. But an objection may be raised apropos of a so-called synchronism first suggested by Sylvain Lévi. The Chinese writer Wang-hiuen-t'se[21] (who was in India in 647-48 A.D.) speaks of the Ceylonese king Chi-mi-kia-po-mo as a contemporary of the Indian monarch San-meou-to-lo-kiu-to. The former is identified with Siri Meghavaṇṇa, more properly to be called Kittisiri Meghavaṇṇa. According to the traditional Ceylonese chronology, which starts from 543 B.C., Kittisiri Meghavaṇṇa reigned from 304-332 A.D. According to the modified starting-point proposed by Fleet and Geiger—483 B.C.—his reign period is 352-379 A.D. San-meou-to-lo-kiu-to is equated with Samudragupta, son of Chandragupta I. As Chandragupta II, Samudragupta's son, came to the throne in the 56th or 60th year of the Gupta Era, Samudragupta would reign in the current chronology upto (320+56) 376 or (320+60) 380 A.D. So Kittisiri Meghavaṇṇa can be his contemporary—if we overlook certain difficulties.

The difficulty in the way of 304-332 A.D. for him is that Samudragupta's accession within 12 years of his father's in 320 A.D. which is also very likely to be the date of the father's marriage to the Lichchhavi princess Kumāradevī, is rather improbable. The difficulty for 352-379 A.D. is: Fleet and Geiger's 483 B.C. has no traditional basis in Ceylon and scholars like Wijesinha and Paranavitana reject altogether the notion that it was ever used by Ceylonese chronologists. Modern historians are generally prepared to overlook the difficulty in either case.

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[21] Smith, Vincent, in *The Indian Antiquary*, 1902, p.195.

Face to face, however, with Hiuen-Tsang we come to see the situation rather differently and to give weight to the difficulties. For, Hiuen-Tsang[22] himself has essentially the same story into which Wang-hiuen-t'se, who was his contemporary, introduces his Chi-mi-kia-po-mo and San-meou-to-lo-kiu-to. In view of this fact we may ignore one or two minor dissimilarities of detail and Hiuen-Tsang's bringing in no names but mentioning "a pious king" of Ceylon and the Indian monarch as "Mahā Śrī Rāja". There can be no doubt that Hiuen-Tsang is referring to the very rulers that figure in Wang-hiuen-t'se. But then the whole aspect of the case changes. By Hiuen-Tsang's chronology of Bālāditya, "Mahā Śrī Rāja", *alias* "San-meou-to-lo-kiu-to", cannot belong to the 4th century A.D. and then, since Chandragupta I in this chronology is a man of the B.C. period, Hiuen-Tsang's Gupta contemporary of Chi-mi-kia-po-mo cannot be the son of the founder of the Imperial Guptas but some minor namesake of the great Samudragupta—a namesake coming at the tail-end of the dynasty in the 4th century A.D. instead of at almost its commencement in the 4th-3rd centuries B.C. Lévi's synchronism, therefore, gets directly rebutted by reference to Hiuen-Tsang, who has, we may repeat, the support of all Chinese testimony about Mihirakula's epoch.

Nor is it surprising that Hiuen-Tsang should be in general harmony with the Chinese sources which Lévi himself, as well as Watters, have noticed. For, the condition in which he found Pāṭaliputra, the capital of the Imperial Guptas no less than of the Mauryas in whom he was interested, was not at all such as to suggest the end of the Gupta line where modern historians place it: c.570 A.D. Even Indologists who subscribe to the usual chronology have noticed Hiuen-Tsang's report. J. Charpentier[23] writes: "Prof. Konow points out that at the time when Yuan-tsang visited India...the magnificent capital of the Mauryas was already reduced to a heap of ruins." F.J. Monahan[24] draws our attention to Hiuen-Tsang's mention of Pāṭaliputra as having been not only in ruins but also 'long deserted". Can we conceive that in 630-643 A.D., about 180 years after its full glory at the commonly calculated end of Skandagupta's reign in 467 A.D. and about less than 70 years after the last known Gupta, the capital of a mighty empire would be a wilderness of broken stones? The phrase "long deserted" goes ringing back through several centuries of ruined condition and would be valid if it could stop not later than 320 A.D. when some minor Samudragupta may have synchronised with Kittisiri Meghavaṇṇa.

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[22] *Ibid.*

[23] *JARS*, 1923, p.587.

[24] *The Early History of Bengal* (Calcutta, 1928), p.3.

And here it is most apt for us to turn to the earlier pilgrim Fa-hien. Even in his day—more than two centuries prior to Hiuen-Tsang's—Pāṭaliputra did not present a really glorious sight. He[25] wrote: "This is the town in which king Aśoka reigned. In the city is the royal palace, the different parts of which he commissioned the geni (demons) to construct by piling up the stones. The walls, doorways, and the sculptured designs are no human work. The ruins still exist." R.K. Mookerji[26] quotes a somewhat different translation where the word "ruins" is omitted' but still he is forced to comment:[27] "These remarks rather suggest that Pāṭaliputra did not occupy the same position of importance in the Gupta empire as it had in the Maurya empire". The comment is at odds with Mookerji's own statement[28] on the Gupta empire: "The capital of the empire was Pāṭaliputra called Pushpa in the Allāhābād Pillar Inscription..." Pāṭaliputra could not be the Gupta capital if it was as Fa-hien pictures it in 400-411 A.D.

But then how are we to get round the assertion, found in all our popular history-books, that Fa-hien visited India when the Imperial Guptas were at the height of their power, with Chandragupta II on the throne ? Actually there is not a shred of proof for this assertion. Majumdar,[29] who first says that this pilgrim travelled through Chandragupta's wide dominions for more than six years, goes on to admit: "Unfortunately Fa-hien does not give any account of the political condition of India—he does not even mention the name of the great Gupta emperor." Rawlinson,[30] Mookerji,[31] Basham[32] and Sen[33] confess the same glaring omission.

Perhaps we shall be told: "There is another side to Fa-hien's picture of Pāṭaliputra. Read what he[34] says: 'By the side of the tower of King

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[25] Beal, pp.xxvii, lv.

[26] *The Gupta Empire* (Bombay, 1947), p.62.

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] *Ibid.*, p.53.

[29] *A New History...*, p.172.

[30] *Indian Historical Studies*, p.64.

[31] *The Gupta Empire*, p.58.

[32] *The Wonder that was India* (New York, 1955), p.65.

[33] *India Through Chinese Eyes*.

[34] Beal, I, p. lvi, Ch.XXVII.

Aśoka is built a *Saṅghārāma* belonging to the Great Vehicle, very imposing and elegant. There is also a temple belonging to the little Vehicle. Together they contain 600 or 700 priests; their behaviour is decorous and orderly. Here, one may see eminent priests from every quarter of the world; Śramaṇas and scholars who seek for instruction all flock to this temple.' Fa-hien[35] also says that here he spent three years studying Sanskrit, and was made happy by obtaining certain works on monastic discipline as taught by various schools, for which he had sought elsewhere in vain."

Undoubtedly, Fa-hien is describing a flourishing religious centre, with Buddhism very much in the front. But if he is communicating to us an aspect of Pāṭaliputra in about 400-411 A.D. how is it that those particular Guptas, who were the principal patrons of Buddhism and who are all said to come after his time and before Hiuen-Tsang's, could not keep the city in full flood of religious activity but on the contrary left it in such a state that Hiuen-Tsang, less than seventy years after the last Gupta emperor, could note hundreds of monasteries, Brāhmaṇical temples and Buddhist stupas, all in ruins?[36]

There is something wrong somewhere. And Dhirendranātha Mookerjee[37] puts his finger on the spot when he says of Fa-hien's account of the great *Saṅghārāma*: "The description...reminds us of the similar description of the Nālandā *Saṅghārāma* by Hiuen-Tsang." The difficulty, however, is that Fa-hien talks of the *Saṅghārāma* immediately after speaking of the Maurya palace. D. Mookerjee,[38] quoting from Giles,[39] informs us: "There were originally two *Narratives of Fa-hien*, the first of which in two parts has been lost, and the second, in one volume, is the work we have....A Buddhist priest of the Liang dynasty (A.D. 502-517) named Hui-Chaiao, states that there was another and more extensive narrative of the travels of Fa-hien, in the various countries..." Mookerjee contends that in the abridged narrative which is in our hands certain confusions have taken place. And he drives home his contention by an example.

He says:[40] "From the discussion by General Cunningham (*ASIR*, Vol. XI, pp.186-91) we know that in Fa-hien's travels while describing the Indra-śilā-guhā (near Giryek) two different places have been jumbled up." What we can identify—from the description as well as from the directions and distances given—as Hiuen-Tsang's Indra-śilā-guhā is called by Fa-hien "a small solitary stone hill" (Beal's translation), "a small rocky hill standing by itself" (Remuset's), "the little hill of the isolated rock" (Laidley's), "a small orphan rock hill" (Giles's). Mookerjee, referring to Cunningham's map of Gayā and Bihar in his *Ancient Geography of India*, facing page 452, says that the Indra-śilā-guhā is not "solitary", "isolated", "standing by itself" or "orphan", but forms part of one of the two ranges of hills stretching from Gayā. What can be so designated and is indeed designated by Hiuen-Tsang as an "isolated hill" is the Bihar Hill (Dand Bihar).

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[35] *Ibid.*, pp.lxx-lxxi, Ch.XXXVI.

[36] *Loc.cit.*

[37] *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, (Calcutta, 1939), p.431.

[38] *Ibid.*, p.427.

[39] *Travels of Fa-hsien* (1923), pp.86ff.

[40] *Op.cit.*, p.429.

Judging from this confusion of Indra-śilā-guhā with the Bihar Hill, Mookerjee submits that Pāṭaliputra is confused with Nālandā, which is the next important step, by Fa-hien's abridger who had not seen these localities personally. The confusion, we may add, naturally persists when Fa-hien is spoken of as returning to Pāṭaliputra and staying at the *Saṅghārāma* for two years to collect the precepts of the *Vinaya*.

A most significant point[41] to be marked here is that the jumbling up of the Indra-śilā-guhā and the Bihar Hill occurs in a continuation of the context in which Pāṭaliputra is first mentioned and that it occurs between the mention of two places named Ni-li and Na-lo. "Nalo" sounds much like "Nālandā" and Giles has actually translated it as "Nālandā". But Fa-hien[42] characterises it as the village where Sāriputra was born and where he came back to enter Nirvāṇa. Hiuen-Tsang[43] also refers to the place "where Sāriputra, the venerable one, was born...and obtained Nirvāṇa", and the geographical setting is exactly the same as of Fa-hien's Na-lo. But Hiuen-Tsang calls the place Kālapināka. Beal,[44] in a footnote, draws our attention to this fact. So Fa-hien's Na-lo cannot be Nālandā, and indeed Nālandā is not at all associated with Sāriputra's birth and death. The name "Na-lo" seems somehow to have got affixed to the wrong locality. Its resemblance to "Nālandā" leads us to think that in the four pages, describing Pāṭaliputra and confusing the Indra-śilā-guhā with the Bihar Hill and labelling it as Na-lo what Hiuen-Tsang calls Kālapināka, we have in disguise a reference to Nālandā.

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[41] Beal, I, pp.lv-lviii.

[42] *Ibid.*, p.lviii.

[43] *Ibid.*, II, p.177.

[44] *Ibid.*, I, p.lviii, n.65.

The great *Saṅghārāma* which the account joins up with Pāṭaliputra is precisely the thing we should expect if Nālandā were referred to. And it is precisely the thing which, as we have already shown, we should never expect at Pāṭaliputra in Fa-hien's time if we are to credit Hiuen-Tsang's report of dilapidated monasteries and desolate temples and broken-down stūpas at Pāṭaliputra in his age. Nālandā and nothing except Nālandā could be suggested by Fa-hien's *Saṅghārāma*—and, in view of Hiuen-Tsang's report, no capital of Gupta patrons of Buddhism could be accepted in the centuries between the earlier Chinese pilgrim and the later.

Even if a flourishing Nālandā in contrast to a declining Pāṭaliputra be not deducible from Fa-hien's book, there is no justification to take Sāriputra's place of birth and death for Nālandā, in Fa-hien period. It is incomprehesible how A.S. Altekar,[45] to prove that the Gupta patrons of Buddhism who built Nālandā lived after and not before this period, could write to Mookerjee: "...we find that when Fa-hien visited Nālandā in c.410 A.D. it was only an unimportant village, possessing only one *Stūpa* to commemorate the memory of Sāriputra. Fa-hien did not see any imposing buildings there. How would you explain this ?" More or less the same attitude Altekar has expressed in the chapter "Education, Literature and Sciences" he has contributed to *A New History of the Indian People*:[46] "When Fa-hien visited Nālandā in c.410 A.D. there was no educational activity at the place; but by the end of the 5th century this Buddhist monastery became a famous University, thanks to the generosity of a number of Hindu emperors of the Gupta dynasty." Evidently, our historians have forgotten all about Hiuen-Tsang's Kālapināka, swallowed Giles's arbitrary identification of Sāriputra's village with Nālandā and overlooked the fact that Sāriputra and Nālandā have nothing to do with each other.

Fa-hien, thus, lends no support to the modern chronology and stands by Hiuen-Tsang, rendering it as good as certain that on Chinese authority the Imperial Guptas belonged to an epoch much earlier than his and had already come to an end by the time of his Indian tour in 400-411 A.D.

"As good as certain" we have said. For, the final certainty on the basis of Chinese sources must wait for an answer to one more objection. I-tsing,[47] who was in India towards the close of the 7th century A.D., refers to a king named Chi-li-ki-to (Śrīgupta), who flourished 500 years prior to his day. An attempt is made by some historians to identify I-tsing's Śrīgupta with Chandragupta I's grandfather whose name is Gupta. If this attempt is well founded, Chandragupta I cannot belong to the B.C. period.

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[45] *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Calcutta, 1939, p.428.

[46] P.398.

However, I-tsing's chronology hardly clinches the modern dating of the founder of the Imperial Guptas. When Chandragupta's accession is put in 320 A.D. then by the normal computation of a generation as 25 to 33 years his grandfather's time will be round about (320-60) 260 A.D. But I-tsing wants us to go back by 500 years from the closing quarter of the 7th century A.D. This means round about 175 A.D.—a time too early for the king proposed. We should have to allot nearly a century and a half to the reigns of the two ancestors of Chandragupta I.

D.C. Sircar puts up another argument too. He[48] remarks about Chandragupta's grandfather: "The name of this prince is Gupta and not Śrīgupta. It is, therefore, unreasonable to identify him with Śrīgupta mentioned by I-tsing as having lived about 175 A.D." Sircar's argument may not appear in itself convincing; for the Gupta kings do carry in their inscriptions an honorific "Śrī" which connotes "Illustrious." Thus Samudragupta is called: "the son of the son's son of the Mahārāja, Śrī Gupta; the son's son of the Mahārāja, Śrī Ghaṭotkacha; the son of the Mahārājadhirāja, Śrī Chandragupta..."[49] But if we look at the argument in the context of two seals[50] that have been found, it discloses its point. One seal has the legend *Gutasya* (in mixed Sanskrit and Prakrit) and the other the Sanskrit legend *Śrīguptasya.* There seem to be two different names here, the former with a dropped honorific and the latter with the word "Śrī" as integral part of the name. This fact, along with the chronological criticism, leaves I-tsing's Śrīgupta unexplained, on our placing the founder of the Imperial Guptas in 320 A.D.

This monarch, however, stands very naturally where he does if we start the dynasty somewhere in 325-315 B.C. and make him one of the members of its tail-end, a predecessor of Wang-hiuen-t'se's San-meou-to-lo-kiu-to by about 125 years.

All Chinese sources thus back up Hiuen-Tsang's chronology and provide hurdles in the way of the modern dating of the Imperial Guptas.

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[47] Sen, *India through Chinese Eyes*, p.162.

[48] *Select Inscriptions* (Calcutta, 1942), Vol. I, p.492, note to line 9 of p.256.

[49] *A New History...*, pp.127-28.

[50] *Ibid.*, p.131.

14

Political History of Central India in the Gupta Age

K.D. Bajpai

In the political and cultural history of our country, Central India (now included largely in the State of Madhya Pradesh) played a vital role. Due to its central location and the geographical peculiarities, its contribution has been of a varied nature. During the proto-historic times it was the meeting ground of the aboriginal cultures with the Aryan culture. This gave rise to a composite civilization in regard to life and thought.

During the Mahājanapada period, Avanti and Chedi were the two great kingdoms in Central India. Ujjayinī was the capital of Avanti (Malwa) and became a centre of political and cultural activities. Another important town of Malwa was Māhishmatī (present Maheshwar in the Khargone district). Vidiśā on the river Vetravatī (Betwa) was the biggest town of eastern Malwa. The town of Airikiṇa (present Eran) was the military headquarters of eastern Malwa. In the subsequent periods, Vidiśā acquired the position of a *rājadhānī* (capital) of western India.

In the 4th century A.D. a new power, the Gupta dynasty, arose in northern India. One of the Gupta emperors, Samudragupta, made a country-wise conquest. He uprooted several ruling dynasties of northern India and subdued the monarchs of the south.[1] He conquered eastern Malwa and appointed his son, Rāmagupta, to look after the newly conquered territory. The Śakas of western India submitted to the suzerainty of Samudragupta. Other parts of Madhya Pradesh, north of the Narmadā, were annexed by Samudragupta to the Gupta empire. The region south of Narmadā was ruled over by the Vākāṭakas, with whom the Guptas maintained friendly relations throughout.

The credit goes to Samudragupta for implementing the Aryan traditional ideas of a *chakravartī*, as conceived by Kauṭilya and other thinkers. He desired to establish, in practice, the idea of a welfare state, as enshrined in the Vedic way of thought. In that respect he differed from the Maurya emperor Aśoka, whose guideline for administration was the Buddhist philosophy. Chandragupta II continued the *chakravartī* tradition of his illustrious father.

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[1] The title of *sarva-rājo-chchhettā* on the Kācha type of gold coins was that of Samudragupta, his personal name being Kācha.

Soon after the death of Samudragupta, the Śakas, taking advantage of the weakness of Rāmagupta, overpowered the latter. The Śaka chief demanded the hand of Dhruvadevī, the beautiful queen of Rāmagupta, in order to humiliate the glory of the Guptas. Rāmagupta, however, decided to yield to this nefarious demand. But due to timely intervention of Chandragupta, the younger brother of Rāmagupta, the Gupta prestige was saved from disgrace. The Śaka chief was murdered and the Śakas were ousted from eastern Malwa. Soon after this episode, Rāmagupta too was put to death and Chandragupta became emperor. He consolidated the empire and eventually succeeded in putting an end to the rule of the Śakas in western Malwa, Gujarat and Kathiawar. The achievements of Chandragupta II in the field of art and culture were equally great.

The credit for developing towns like Ujjayinī, Vidiśā, Eran and several other centres largely goes to Chandragupta II. Kālidāsa, the greatest Sanskrit poet and dramatist, flourished in the Gupta age. His period can approximately be bracketted between c.350 and 425 A.D. In his great work *Raghuvaṁśa* (Canto IV) Kālidāsa has described, in the form of Raghu's *digvijaya*, the all-India conquests of Samudragupta and Chandragupta II.

RĀMAGUPTA

The problem of Rāmagupta of the Gupta dynasty has been a controversial one. Various views have been expressed by scholars about this 'mysterious' Gupta ruler. The references to Rāmagupta, both literary and archaeological, are too well-known to be enumerated here. All these evidences, culled together, tend to prove that Chandragupta II Vikramāditya had an elder brother named Rāmagupta, who proved to be cowardly and agreed to the most humiliating proposal of a Śaka king who had demanded Rāmagupta's beautiful wife, Dhruvadevī. This ultimately led to the assassination of the Śaka king as well as of Rāmagupta.

Quite a good number of round copper coins, bearing the name of Rāmagupta, have been discovered in eastern Malwa. They bear the figure of a lion (usually with an upraised tail) on one side and the name of Rāmagupta on the other. During my explorations in Eran (dist. Sagar) and in the Vidiśā district, a large number of the coins of Rāmagupta were discovered. These include not only the lion-type coins but also coins of a new type, bearing the figure of garuḍa in place of lion.

It is quite well-known that garuḍa was the emblem of the Imperial Gupta rulers who were devout Vaishṇavas. It was, therefore, in the fitness of things that they adopted this emblem on their coins, seals, etc. This has been attested to by the actual find of these relics, which represent the bird prominently in various forms. The excavations at Eran, recently conducted by the University of Sagar, under the direction of the present author, have brought to light coins of Rāmagupta, both of the lion and garuḍa types. Later on two more coin-types—garuḍadhvaja and border legend-type—of Rāmagupta, in large numbers, were discovered in eastern Malwa and published by me.

These four types of coins of Rāmagupta exhibit several varieties in so far as the fabric, size and weight are concerned. This obviously indicates that different moulds and dies were utilized for preparing them. The palaeography of the coins-legends is typically early Gupta. The letter *ma* occurs in both the circular and triangular forms, more often in the latter form. Sometimes the letters are found written in an ornamental style. On the basis of the palaeography, these coins can easily be assigned to the second half of the fourth century A.D.

The copper coins of Rāmagupta are akin to some coins of the Nāgas and those of the local Mālwa rulers, which were issued prior to the occupation of the Malwa region by the Guptas. The coins of Rāmagupta do not seem to be the issues of any local chief of the Imperial Guptas, nor of any feudatory king named Rāmagupta. From literary and other evidences, so far available, we do not know of any other Rāmagupta in the 3rd-4th centuries A.D. except of the elder brother of Chandragupta II of the Gupta dynasty.

Thus, these coins were issued by Rāmagupta, the elder brother of Chandragupta II. It is well-known that the latter ruler issued his silver currency for the Malwa-Gujarat region, similar to the coins of the western Kshatrapas, after uprooting them from that area. Local traditions have played considerable role in Indian history and the field of numismatics is no exception. It was but natural that Rāmagupta's coins were issued in eastern Malwa in close imitation of the fabric and type of the coins already current in that area. Like the Nāga and other Malwa coins, which are also usually round, the bust of the king Rāmagupta does not appear on his coins. We have the figure of a lion or garuḍa within the border of dots on one side and the name of the king in Brāhmī characters on the other. In the case of several Malwa coins we have lion[1a] or the humped bull[2] on the obverse. In some cases the obverse has a slender-necked vase,[3] the exact copy of which is found on some copper coins of Chandragupta II,[4] whose currency was also in circulation in Malwa.

The king's portrait is conspicuous by its absence on the Malwa[5] and Nāga coins and so also on the coins of Rāmagupta. We know that on some copper coins of Chandragupta II also, the king's portrait does not appear. This was obviously due to the tiny nature of these coins. The stately figure of lion, with upraised tail on the lion-type coins of Rāmagupta, can well be compared with a similar figure of the animal in the case of the Malwa[6] and Nāga coins.[7] The style of the Brāhmī legend and the palaeography also bear similar traits.[8] On several coins of Rāmagupta, the legend 'Śrī Rāmagupta' is very clear. On the reverse of Rāmagupta's coins we have garuḍa in place of the bull of the Nāga coins. The crescent on Rāmagupta's coins can well be compared with that found on some Nāga coins.[9]

The only innovation, worth mention, in the case of Rāmagupta's coins is the appearance of garuḍa, the characteristic symbol of the Gupta dynasty. It is abundantly found on the gold, silver and copper coins of the rulers of this dynasty. The garuḍa-type coins of Rāmagupta, identified for the first time by the present writer, far outnumber the lion-type coins of this ruler. The most striking feature pertaining to this type is that on some coins we clearly find the garuḍa-dhvaja, as we get on a large number of Gupta gold coins, including those of Samudragupta. On this variety of coins the letter *rā* appears on the left and *ma* on the right of the garuḍa-dhvaja. The reverse bears the figure of garuḍa, as on other coins of this type.

[1a] Smith, V.A., *Catalogue of the Coins in the Indian Museum*, Calcutta, Vol.I, Pt. ii, p.172, Pl. XX. 16.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp.172-73, Pl. XX. 17-19.

[3] *Ibid.*, Pl. XX. 15.

[4] Allan, J., *Catalogue of the Coins of the Gupta Dynasties*, Pl. XI. 22; Altekar, *Coinage of the Gupta Empire*, Pl. XVI. 19.

[5] Smith wrongly thinks that the reverse of coin no.58 illustrated in his *Catalogue* (Pl. XX. 21) bears king's head. It appears to be a peacock with expanded tail, covering the whole surface, as found on a similar coin illustrated and described by Smith (n.62, Pl. XX. 22). See also Altekar, *Coinage of the Gupta Empire*, Pl. XVI. nos.18-19. On these copper coins of Chandragupta II, the portrait of the king does not appear.

[6] Smith, *op.cit.*, Pl. XXI. 3-4.

[7] Trivedi, *Catalogue of the Coins of Nāga Kings* (Gwalior, 1957), Pl.IV. nos.11,14, etc.

[8] Cf. Smith, *op.cit.*, Pl. XXI. 1-6. On some copper coins of Chandragupta II the legend is *Śrī Chandragupta* (Altekar, *ibid.*, Pl. XVI. 14).

[9] Trivedi, H.V., *loc.cit.*, Pl. III, nos.35-38.

Looking to the large number of coins of Rāmagupta, and particularly of the garuḍa type from Vidiśā and Eran, it appears most likely that this Rāmagupta was none other than the elder brother of Chandragupta II.

The conquest of the eastern Malwa by Samudragupta is clearly attested to by a stone inscription found at Eran.[10] The inscription tends to show that emperor Samudragupta had made Eran (Airikiṇa of the inscriptions) the headquarters for the eastern Malwa region. It appears that Samudragupta re-visited Eran, in his old age, perhaps in the accompaniment of his wife and several sons and grandsons (*bahuputrapautrā*). It may be noted here that besides commanding a panoramic view of the surrounding green land, Eran was located on a strategic point on the border of the eastern Malwa. It lay on the main route joining eastern Malwa with the Vatsa kingdom on one hand and, via Vidiśā, with Avanti on the other. Samudragupta, therefore, rightly selected this place for his encampment, which may have developed into a military outpost.

A number of battles are known to have been fought at Eran during the Gupta rule. Reference may be made to the Boar-image inscription of Toramāṇa, the Hūṇa chief, and to the Goparāja pillar inscription of Bhānugupta, both found at Eran. Rāmagupta may have been appointed at Eran, during the last days of his father, to look after the newly conquered region of eastern Malwa. The unsteady political condition during the time, as revealed from various sources, may have compelled Rāmagupta to stay in Malwa, even after the death of his father, when his above-mentioned coins may have been issued. We have similar case of the Gupta princes, Govindagupta and Ghaṭotkachagupta,[11] who were later on appointed to look after Malwa.

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[10] Fleet, J.F., *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol.III, pp.18ff.

[11] *EI*, Vol.XXVII, pp.12-18 and Vol.XXVI, pp. 115-18. Only one gold coin bearing the name 'Ghaṭo' has so far been discovered. It was probably issued by this Ghaṭotkachagupta, who may have succeeded his elder brother (?) Govindagupta. Both these were probably sons of Chandragupta Vikramāditya.

It may be suggested here that the episode leading to the murder of the Śaka prince, demanding the hand of Rāmagupta's wife Dhruvadevī, and later on the murder of Rāmagupta himself took place at Eran or Vidiśā. The stone inscriptions of the Śaka prince Śrīdharavarmā at Eran and Sāñchī and the coins and seals of the western Kshatrapas found in that area confirm this surmise.

A number of points in this connection require consideration. It is argued that no gold coin of Rāmagupta is known; nor do we get his name in the royal genealogies of the Gupta dynasty. The problem of Kācha is also there.[12]

Regarding these points it may be observed that the royal gold mint in the beginning of the Gupta supremacy was probably located at Pāṭaliputra. The gold coins of Chandragupta I and Samudragupta were minted there. Rāmagupta, in his very brief rule after the death of his father, apparently had no control over Magadha.

The reason why the name of Rāmagupta is conspicuous by its absence in the Gupta genealogical records can be easily understood. Due to his alleged cowardice, he was regarded as one who brought notoriety to the fair name of the dynasty.[12a] His inclination towards Jainism may also have been a cause for this.

It may be observed that the new device of chakradhvaja on the Kācha type coins of Samudragupta was not adopted by the succeeding rulers of the Gupta dynasty. Kācha seems to have been the personal name of Samudragupta.

After the murders of the Śaka chief and his own elder brother Rāmagupta, Chandragupta may have gone to Pāṭaliputra. He succeeded in occupying the throne of his father at the capital.

The historicity of Rāmagupta as a ruler of the Imperial Gupta house has been confirmed by the discovery of three inscribed Tīrthaṅkara images, giving his name with the title *mahārājādhirāja*. These images have been discovered in the village Durjanpur near

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[12] Rāmagupta cannot be identified with Kācha, as the coin-types of the two are entirely different from each other. See *JNSI*, Vol.XXIII, pp.340-41, Pl. X. 1-12; cf. Goyal, *A History of the Imperial Guptas*, Ch.IV.

[12a] Several references in this connection have already been noticed by D.R. Bhandarkar, A.S. Altekar and others. An allusion, so far pointed out by none, is also found in Bhāravi's *Kiratārjunīyaṁ* (XVII. 4) referring probably to Dhruvadevī and her protector Chandragupta (in the form of Arjuna):

Vaṁsochitatvādabhimānavatyā samprāptayā sampriyatāma-subhyaḥ/
Samakshamāditstayā pareṇa badhvevakīrtyā paritapyamānaḥ.//

Vidiśā. So far more than two thousand copper coins of Rāmagupta have been examined by me. Most of these have been obtained in the Vidiśā-Eran region.[13]

CHANDRAGUPTA II

The region of Madhya Pradesh, particularly the area of Malwa, received special attention during the reign of Chandragupta II. His ins-criptions, found at Udaigiri and Sāñchī bear a testimony to this. A good number of his gold, silver and copper coins have been discovered in Malwa. Chandragupta II endeavoured to maintain cordial relations with the dynasties of the Nāgas, Varmans and Vākāṭakas, the three main ruling dynasties of ancient Madhya Pradesh. If we believe the Purāṇic records, the Gupta hegemony during the reign of Chandragupta II, also known as Devarakshita and Devagupta, spread over Kosala, Oḍra, Tāmralipta and Purī.[14]

KUMĀRAGUPTA I

After the death of Chandragupta II, the Gupta supremacy over the Varmans of Daśapura (Mandsaur) seems to have been eclipsed for sometime during the early reign of his son Kumāragupta I. This is evident from the inscription of king Naravarmā (404 A.D.) and the Gaṅgadhār inscription of Viśvavarmā (423 A.D.) In these records overlordship of the Guptas over the Varmans is not indicated. Kumāragupta I, however, succeeded in establishing the Gupta hegemony over western Malwa. This is borne out from the Mandsaur record of Bandhuvarmā of the year 493 (436 A.D.) In this inscription we find a definite mention of Kumāragupta I.

The stone inscription from Tumain (dist. Guna in M.P.) dated year 116 (435 A.D.) mentions Ghaṭotkachagupta (probably a son of Kumāragupta I) as the governor of eastern Malwa with the headquarters at Tumbavana (Tumain). Ghaṭotkacha, later on issued his gold coins and ruled for a short time.

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[13] D.R. Bhandarkar, a staunch supporter of the Rāmagupta theory, was the first to have discovered, in the Besnagar excavation, one lion-type copper coin of Rāmagupta (see *ASR, Ann. Rep.*, 1913-14, p.223, pl.LXIV, no.35). Bhandarkar could not, however, identify the coin correctly. While describing the circular coin (no.50 of his list, wt. 10.5 grains) he wrote: "there is a sea-dragon (mistaken for the lion-figure) on one side and a shaft with a river on the other." The other side, in fact, shows a crescent above and the letters *ramagu* (obviously standing for Rāmagupta) below. The coin is similar to several such lion-type coins recently discovered in the Vidiśā-Eran region.

[14] See Sharma, Dashratha, *IHQ*, XXX, pp.374-78.

During the greater part of the reign of Kumāragupta I, the Gupta empire witnessed tranquility. This is amply borne out from several inscriptions of his time. During his last years, the peaceful atmosphere was disturbed by the Pushyamitras and the Hūṇas. Skandagupta, the son and successor of Kumāragupta I, had to struggle hard against these two turbulent enemies. He succceeded in defeating them, but the Gupta empire was obviously shaken, particularly due to the onrush of the Hūṇas.

SKANDAGUPTA

A stone pillar inscription of this ruler dated Gupta era 141 (460 A.D.) has been discovered at Supia (dist. Rewa in M.P.). It records the setting-up of a *gotra-śailikā* (family memorial stone). The stone pillar has been called *bala-yashṭi* in the inscription. It is curious to note that in this record, Ghaṭotkacha has been called the founder of the Gupta dynasty. The great rulers, Chandragupta II and Kumāragupta I have been mentioned there by their *virudas* only, viz. Vikramāditya and Mahendrāditya respectively. The mention of Ghaṭotkacha as the first king, in place of Śrīgupta, indicates that during the time the present inscription was incised the name of Ghaṭotkacha had probably become more prominent in this region than that of Śrīgupta, the first ruler of the dynasty.

The inscription belongs to the reign of Skandagupta. He is called only *mahārāja*, in place of *mahārājādhirāja*,the title which is denied in the inscription to Samudragupta and to Kumāragupta I as well. Skandagupta is rightly eulogized in the inscription thus:

> He resembled a Chakravartī in strength and valour, Rāma in righteous conduct and Yudhishṭhira in truthfulness and humility.[15]

The Pushyamitras, referred to in the Bhitari stone inscription of Skandagupta can be identified with the scions of the Mitra dynasties, of which the originator was Pushyamitra Śuṅga. They seem to have risen to power during the later years of Kumāragupta I. They were repulsed and crushed by Skandagupta. We do not hear of the Pushyamitras after this.

It was due to the valorous deeds of Skandagupta that the enemies of the Gupta dynasty received a set-back and the rule of the Imperial Guptas continued for quite sometime after him. After the defeat of the

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[15] *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings*, revised by D.R. Bhandarkar and edited by Chhabra and Gai (Delhi, 1981), pp.317-19.

Pushyamitras and the Hūṇas, there was tranquility in the Gupta empire. In this connection the view of Dr. R.C. Majumdar is worth noting:

> The statement in the inscriptions (of Skandagupta) that he thoroughly defeated the Hūṇas seems to be borne out by the fact that we have no evidence of the Hūṇa depredations east of Gandhāra till the close of the fifth or the beginning of the sixth century A.D.[16]

IMMEDIATE SUCCESSORS OF SKANDAGUPTA

An important silver-copper seal discovered at Bhitari reveals the names of three Gupta emperors: Purugupta, Narasiṁhagupta and Kumāragupta II. This has been confirmed by the epigraphical evidence obtained from Nālandā and Sarnath. Other records have added some more names. The inscriptions from Tumain and Eran (dist. Sagar, M.P.) have furnished the names of Ghaṭotkachagupta and Bhānugupta respectively. A few gold coins bearing the legend *Prakāśāditya* have been attributed to Puragupta, the son of Kumāragupta I from Anantadevī. King Ghaṭotkachagupta of the Tumain inscription can be identified with his namesake mentioned in the Basarh clay sealing. He was most probably a son of Chandragupta II. He was at first governor of eastern Malwa. After the death of his brother, he became king for a short time. This is proved by his two gold coins. These coins bear the legend *Ghaṭo* along with the title of the ruler *Kramāditya*.[17]

A memorial stone pillar inscription from Eran, dated G.E. 191 (510 A.D.), records that Goparāja, a friend of the Gupta emperor Bhānugupta, bravely fought against the enemies and eventually died. His wife became *satī* at his funeral pyre. His battle was obviously against the Hūṇa king Toramāṇa, who had penetrated as far as Eran in eastern Malwa. This is borne out from the Eran Boar inscription bearing the first regnal year of Toramāṇa. The Hūṇa king was anxious to occupy the entire Malwa region. But he was badly routed by his contemporary Aulikara ruler Prakāśadharmā, who put an end to the ambitions of the Hūṇa chief. This seems to have happened soon after 510 A.D. With this the region of Eran became free from the Hūṇa occupation.

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[16] *The Vākāṭaka-Gupta Age* (reprint,Delhi, 1967), pp.163-64; see also Agrawal, Ashvini, *Rise and Fall of the Imperial Guptas* (Delhi, 1989), pp.210-18.

[17] About the successors of Skandagupta, see Agrawal, *ibid.*, pp.220-30; Goyal, *op.cit.*, pp.314-35.

The above information has been obtained from a recently discovered long stone inscription from a site called Risthal in the Mandsaur district of M.P.[18] The discovery of this inscription also indicates that by the beginning of the 6th century A.D., the extensive Aulikara kingdom had more than one capital, its chief political centre being at Daśapura.

After the Hūṇa menace was successfully crushed by the Guptas and the Aulikaras, the chief Gupta territory of Madhyadeśa enjoyed peace and tranquility upto atleast 528 A.D. This is borne out from the reference to "the enjoyment of sovereignty by the Gupta rulers" in an inscription of the Parivrājaka ruler Saṁkshobha, dated G.E. 209 (528 A.D.).

BUDHAGUPTA

Budhagupta was a son of Purugupta. His earliest known date is G.E. 157 (476 A.D.). During his reign a colossal stone pillar (*garuḍa-dhvaja*) was erected at Eran in the Gupta era 165 (484 A.D.).

The name of the Gupta emperor, as given in the inscription, is Budhagupta. His feudatory, Suraśmichandra, was ruling over the land between the Yamunā and the Narmadā, the extensive tract of land including Eran. The local governor at Eran was Mātṛvishṇu. According to the inscription he, along with his brother Dhanyavishṇu, caused to be erected a flag staff (*dhvaja-stambha*) in honour of Lord Vishṇu whose temple already existed there. The stone pillar, 47 feet in height, bearing this inscription stands just in front of the Vishṇu temple. The pillar is surmounted by a two-armed figure of Garuḍa, the *vāhana* of Lord Vishṇu. Garuḍa is carved both in the front and the back, holding a snake in his hands.

Recenlty a new copper plate inscription of the time of Budhagupta has been discovered at Shankarpur in the Shahdol distt. of M.P.[19] It records the grant of a village Chitrapālyā to a Brāhmaṇa Gosvāmī by Mahārāja Harivarmā in the Gupta year 168 (487 A.D.). This inscription is important on account of the fact that it indicates that the Maukhari ruler Harivarmā was a feudatory of emperor Budhagupta in the year 487 A.D. Harivarmā's dynasty gradually moved towards the north-west. After the decline of the Gupta power in central India, the Maukharis carved out their independent principality. Soon after they rose to imperial position and made Kānyakubja (Kanauj) their capital.

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[18] *Journal of the Epigraphical Society of India*, Vol.X, pp.93ff. The inscription informs us that Prakāśadharmā not only gave a crushing defeat to the army of Toramāṇa, but also captured the ladies of his harem, and deprived him of the title of 'overlord of kings'. This happened before the Mālwa year 572 (515 A.D.). Cf. Goyal, S.R., *Guptakālīna Abhilekha*, pp.363-65.

[19] *Journal of the Epigraphical Society of India*, Vol.IV, pp.62ff.

THE HŪṆAS

After the death of Budhagupta in about 500 A.D., the disintegration of the extensive Gupta empire started. The Maukharis and the Hūṇas tried to take advantage of the declining position of the Gupta power. A rock inscription of the Maukharis has been recently found at Narsinghgarh, not very far from Gwalior. The inscription is written in the Brāhmī script of the late Gupta period, and can be assigned to the beginning of the 6th century A.D. It indicates that the Maukharis were occupying the area at that time.

The Hūṇa chief Toramāṇa had advanced up to eastern Malwa. But he was soon badly routed in battle by the Aulikara king Prakāśadharmā who devastated the entire camp of Toramāṇa. This is known from the newly discovered Risthal stone inscription, dated V.S. 572 (515 A.D.) of Prakāśadharmā. His successor Yaśodharmā-Vishṇuvardhana defeated Toramāṇa's son Mihirakula, who is said to have bowed down his forehead before the victor.[20] Having lost all hopes in the Malwa region, Mihirakula tried his luck in the Gopāchala (Gwalior) area. He succeeded in occupying Gopāchala for a short time. This is evident from an inscription of his time found there. The inscription refers to the 15th regnal year of Mihirakula.[21] But it does not seem plausible that he occupied Gopāchala for so many years. His regnal year may have started, immediately after the death of his father Toramāṇa, somewhere outside Gopāchala.

Mihirakula's hold over Gopāchala was short. Except the inscription of Mātṛcheṭa, we have no other evidence regarding his rule over that area. His coins are also not known from Gopāchala.

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[20] See Sircar, D.C., *Select Inscriptions* (Calcutta, 2nd ed., 1965), Vol. I, No.54, pp.418-20.

[21] Sircar, *ibid.*, No.57, pp.424-26.

15

The Guptas (Guttas) of Karnataka

Shrinivas Ritti

The region traditionally known as Karnataka, or for that matter the whole of the Deccan from the Narmadā in the north to the Kāverī in the south, occupied a prominent position in the political and cultural history of the country of the early and medieval period. Herein rose such mighty kingdoms as those of the Chālukyas (of Badami), the Rāshṭrakūṭas and the Later Chālukyas (of Kalyāṇa), the Seuṇas and the Hoysaḷas, till the 14th cent. A.D.

Situated as they were in the centre of the southern part of the country, the kingdoms of Karnataka made considerable impact on the kingdoms of the northern part of the Deccan as well as those of further south. Their contacts were not merely political in nature. Many of the kings established matrimonial relationships with their counterparts in other regions. Men of religion, merchants and literary figures moved from one place to another and many of them settled in different regions. For some reason or the other members of royal families migrated to the other regions, and when an opportunity arose, built up their own principalities and ruled over them identifying themselves with the local environment, yet not forgetting their roots. The Sena rulers of Bengal (11-12 century A.D.) and the Karṇāṭas of Mithilā (11-12 centuries) are well known examples of the migrants from Karnataka who carved out their own kingdoms in the respective regions. Similarly, we have examples of the scions of the famous dynasties of the north settling in the Karnataka region and ruling over small areas, though as subordinates of the imperial rulers. One example is that of the Mauryas of the Koṅkaṇa region. The Mauryas of Pāṭaliputra of 3rd-2nd century B.C. are well-known in history. But little known are their descendants who held sway over the coastal region of Karnataka centuries later (6-7 century A.D.). So also is the story of the descendants of the Guptas of Pāṭaliputra who became prominent feudatory rulers under the Chālukyas of Kalyāṇa in the 11-13th century A.D.

The existence of the Guptas of Karnataka was noticed long back by Fleet who published a short account of them in his *Dynasties of the*

Karnarese Districts incorporated in the *Bombay Gazetteer* (Vol.I, p.11). With the subsequent discovery of more inscriptions pertaining to the family, more information has become available. This has been consolidated in this paper.

The inscriptions of this family are found mostly in southern parts of Dharwad district and a few in the adjoining Bellary and Shimoga districts. The earliest inscription belongs to 1115 A.D. and the latest to 1283 A.D. During the intervening period the members of this family ruled as feudatories of the imperial rulers, the Chālukyas of Kalyāṇa, the Kalachuris and the Seuṇas.

In the inscriptions, the name of the family occurs as *Gutta* which obviously is a corruption or local form of the word *Gupta*. Their connection with the imperial Guptas of the 4-5 centuries A.D. is amply demonstrated by the titles they bore, namely *Gupta-vaṁśa-triṇetra, Chandragupta-vaṁś-oddbhava, Ujjayinīpuravarādhīśvara* and *Chandraguptānvaya-sudhārṇava-pūrṇachandra.* One of the titles associates them with Pāṭaliputra also. The headquarters of their principality was known as Guttavoḷal i.e., the city of the Guttas i.e., the Guptas. The place is now a small village in the Haveri taluk of Dharwad district, under the name Guttala which is obviously a coloquial abbreviation of Guttavoḷal. In Kannada *hoḷal* or *hoḷalu* means a place, a city. The meaning of the word thus is 'the place or the city of the Guttas'. Incidently it may be noted that the association of the imperial Guptas themselves with the Kannada region is not unknown to history. The famous Tāḷaguṇḍa inscription of Kadamba Kākutsthavarman speaks of his establishing matrimonial relationship with the Guptas who were his contemporaries. It is also known that one of his daughters was married to some imperial Gupta prince. It is, however, difficult to trace direct descent of the Guttas of the 11-13 century A.D. from the imperial Guptas of the 4-5th century A.D. though their connection is undisputed.

The geneology given in the inscriptions of these Guttas begins with Māgutta i.e. Mahāgupta (somewhat comparable with Śrīgupta). The next chief was his son Gutta (Gutta I). One of the inscriptions states in a dramatic way that he was not satisfied with the small territory he inherited from his forefathers. So he went on a military expedition and expanded his kingdom. For all practical purposes he seems to have been the real founder of the Gutta principality, which in its hey-day covered even the province of Banavasi 12000. The same inscription describes him as the 'greatest of the Gutta family' and the 'auspicious pinnacle of the royal palace which was the Gutta family' (*Guttānavaya-rājabhavana-maṅgala-kalaśam*). However, he was actually a feudatory under Chālukya Vikramāditya VI (1076-1120 A.D.)

Gutta's son and successor was Mallideva. He also served under Vikramātidya VI. Mallideva's brother was Jōma or Jōyideva I. The Gutta principality further expanded under this chief. Inscriptions state that he governed the divisions of Beḷuhuge 70, Honnavatti 12 and Beṇṇevuru 12 from his headquarters at Guttavoḷal. These regions covered the area around Guttal. An inscription from Honnatti, a village near Guttal, eulogises him thus:

> In him, virtue and valour vied with each other. Protecting those who took shelter under him, subduing those who faced him in the wars, giving generously to those who approached him, were nothing new or strange in him, for, after all, it was the great tradition (*pūrvābhyāsa*) of the Gutta family.

Jōyideva I was succeeded by Mallideva's son Vikramāditya I. Jōyideva had a sister named Bāchaladevī. She was married to a Kadamba chief Bīradeva. Vikramāditya I had a sister named Laḷiyādevī, who was also married to another Kadamba chief named Ketarasa. Pāṇḍya, the son of this couple, married Bāchaladevī, the daughter of Vikramāditya I.

Vikramāditya I was succeeded by his son Jōyideva II. During the latter's reign the Gutta principality expanded further so as to include Binnavura 12, Sattaḷige 12 and Budirahaḷḷi 12. These villages are traceable in the vicinity of Guttal. An inscription associates him with the governership of Banavasi 12000 also.

Jōyideva II was succeeded by Vikramāditya II who was the son of his younger brother Gutta II. Probably Jōyideva had no issue and Gutta II predeceased his brother.

Vikramāditya II was most prominent of all the members of the Gutta family. He inherited a vast territory and added some more, such as Noḷambavāḍī and Perbāḷu 70. His territory included the whole of the southern part of Dharwad district, eastern part of Bellary district and the northern portions of Shimoga district, all in the present day Karnataka State.

Vikramāditya II ruled from 1183 A.D. to 1233 A.D. The special feature of his rule was that he became almost independent of his overlords. His inscriptions do not mention any overlord. This was a period of turmoil in the political history of Karnataka. Taila III of the

Chālukya family was ousted by the Kalachuri chief Bijjala who occupied the Chālukya throne. The short rule of the Kalachuris was not peaceful either. The next Chālukya prince Someśvara IV staged a comeback but his rule also was very short, covering not more than four years. Taking advantage of this confusion, the prominent feudatories of the Chālukyas, namely the Seuṇas in the northern region and the Hoysaḷas in the southern, revolted against the centre and tried to occupy as much of the kingdom as possible on either side. Eventually, Someśvara had to flee the capital and the Seuṇas and the Hoysaḷas established their rule, in the northern and the southern regions respectively, independent of the erstwhile Chālukya empire. Gutta Vikramāditya II also took advantage of this situation and functioned as an independent ruler.

Vikramāditya II was succeeded by his elder son Jōyideva III who in turn was succeeded by his younger brother Vikramāditya III. Vikramāditya II had a daughter named Tuḷuvaladevī who was married to a local chief named Ballāḷa. By this time the Seuṇas were firmly established as sovereign rulers and the Guttas had to accept their suzerainty. Vikramāditya III accepted the subordination of the Seuṇa king Kannara.

After Vikramāditya III, the family seems to have fallen into bad days. We find very few details about them in this period. A few inscriptions, however, do give same names and dates.

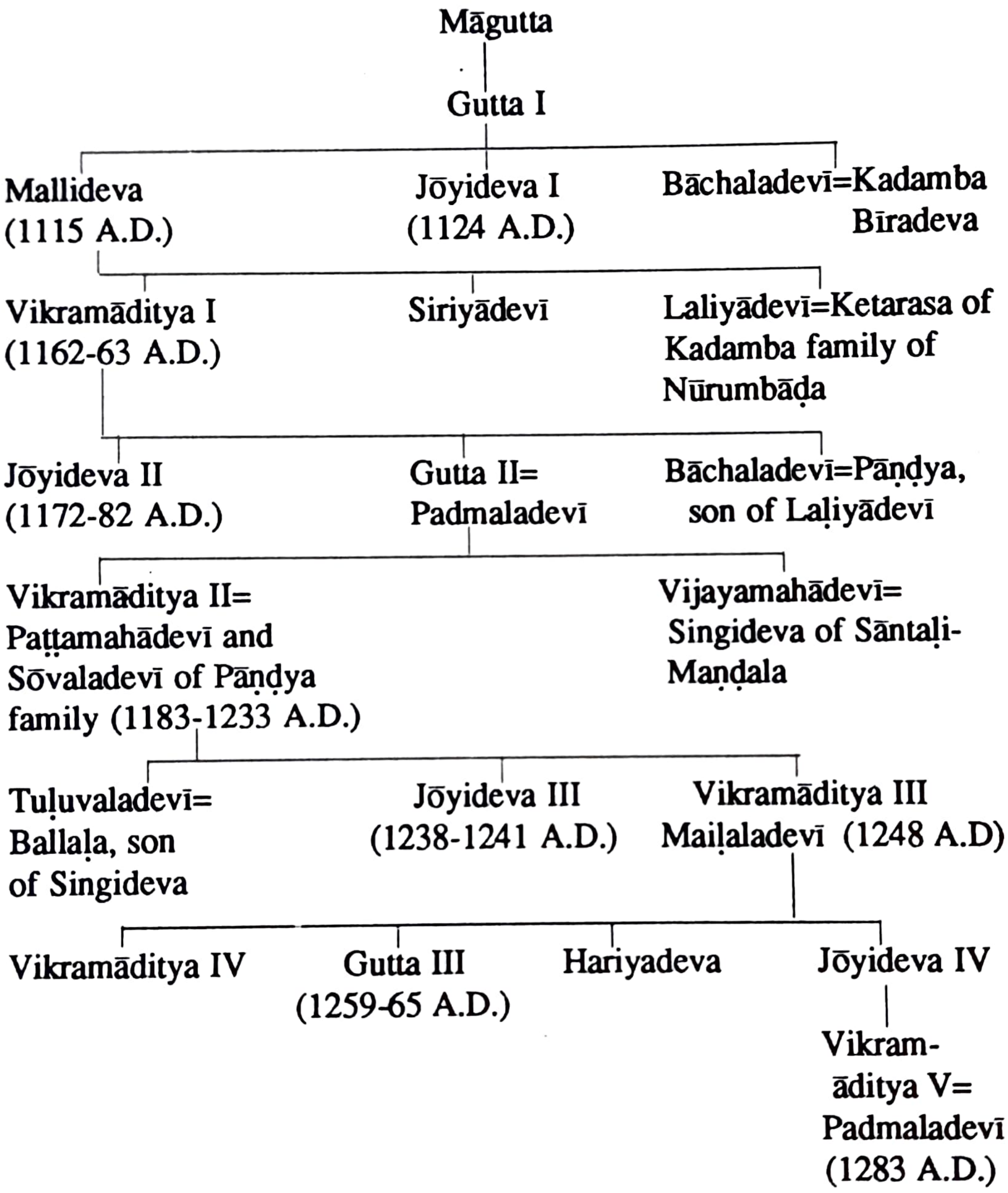
Vikramāditya III had four sons, Vikramāditya IV, Gutta III, Hiriyadeva and Jōyideva IV. Of them, only the dates of Gutta III are known ranging between 1259 and 1265 A.D. He was also subordinate to Seuṇa Kannara and Mahādeva. A known date of Vikramāditya V, the son of Jōyideva IV, is 1283 A.D. The name of his wife figures in an inscription as Padmaladevī.

Vikramāditya V is the last known chief of the Gutta family. He lived in a period which was marked by political chaos in the Deccan caused by the invasions of Alā-ud-dīn Khalji and Malik Kāfūr. By the end of the century, both the Seuṇa and the Hoysaḷa empires were eclipsed by these invasions, and the Guttas, the scions of the imperial Guptas of Pāṭaliputra, disappeared from the political scene.

In the cultural sphere, the Guttas made an impact on the Guttavoḷal region, in their own limited way. Following the footsteps of their masters, the Chālukyas of Kalyāṇa, they patronised with zeal, different religious sects prevelant in the region. They also encouraged temple building activities and created excellent specimens of the Chālukyan architecture. They claimed to be the devotees of Gaḷageśvaradeva, the presiding deity of the temple at Gaḷaganātha, now a small village near Gutta. They were also the devotees of the saint Śivadeva of Chauḍḍadānapura which is famous for the temple of Mukteśvara, one of the best examples of Chālukya art. An inscription tells us that Ketiseṭṭi, an officer of Vikramāditya I built at Guttal, a Jaina monastery under the name of Pārśvanātha Jinālāya, in 1162 A.D. Vikramāditya II constructed at the same place a Śiva temple which he dedicated to his mother Padmaladevī and named it after her as Padmeśvara. At Haraḷahaḷḷi he constructed another Śiva temple under highly sentimental circumstances. He constructed it to commemorate the sad demise of his beloved daughter Tuḷuvaladevī who seems to have died an untimely death. The king dedicated the temple to this princess and affectionately named the temple as Tuḷuvaleśvara.

The region under the Guttas was a home for all religions which flourished in harmony. A poet of an inscription, for example, describes the village Honnatti as containing beautiful temples of Vishṇu, attractive rows of Jaina *basadis* and many Bauddha *vihāras*. Even after making an allowance to the poet's imagination, these inscriptions do give a glimpse of the life of the people of those bygone days.

The Genealogy of the Guttas of Karnataka


Māgutta
Gutta I
Mallideva (1115 A.D.)
Jōyideva I (1124 A.D.)
Bāchaladevī=Kadamba Bīradeva
Vikramāditya I (1162-63 A.D.)
Siriyādevī
Laliyādevī=Ketarasa of Kadamba family of Nūrumbāḍa
Jōyideva II (1172-82 A.D.)
Gutta II= Padmaladevī
Bāchaladevī=Pāṇḍya, son of Laḷiyādevī
Vikramāditya II= Paṭṭamahādevī and Sōvaladevī of Pāṇḍya family (1183-1233 A.D.)
Vijayamahādevī= Singideva of Sāntaḷi-Maṇḍala
Tuḷuvaladevī= Ballaḷa, son of Singideva
Jōyideva III (1238-1241 A.D.)
Vikramāditya III Maiḷaladevī (1248 A.D)
Vikramāditya IV
Gutta III (1259-65 A.D.)
Hariyadeva
Jōyideva IV
Vikramāditya V= Padmaladevī (1283 A.D.)

Note: The inscriptions of the Gutta family referred to above are published in the *South Indian Inscriptions* Vol.IX, Pt.I; Vols.XVIII and XX. See also *Bombay Gazetteer*, Vol.I, Pt.I pp.5578 and Ritti, Shrinivas, *The Seuṇas* (*The Yādavas of Devagiri*, Dharwad, 1968).

Part III

CLASSICISM OF THE GUPTA CULTURE

16

Political Ideology of the Early Imperial Guptas

Shankar Goyal

The political activities and attitudes of the imperial Guptas was greatly influenced by their political ideology which was usually a reflection of and conditioned by their religious beliefs. For example, in the case of Narasiṁhagupta Bālāditya, the contemporary of Mihirakula, we know that he came under a strong spell of Buddhism which diminished his martial fervour and love of military adventure. Yuan Chwang records that when Mihirakula raised an army to punish Bālādityarāja, the latter fled 'to conceal his poor person among the bushes of morass' and 'wandered through the mountains and deserts'.[1] Later on, when the Hūṇa tyrant was captured by his subordinate kings, he released him at the intercession of the Queen Mother. Yuan Chwang reports that the Queen Mother bade her son to bring Mihirakula to her presence, gave a sermon to Mihirakula on the impermanence of worldly things and to her son on the merits of forgiveness. Thereupon, Bālāditya not only set Mihirakula free but gave him a young maiden in marriage and sent a guard to escort him across the border.[2] This is a clear proof of the impact of Buddhism on the political thinking of Bālādityarāja and shows that "he regarded the empire as merely a means to inculcate religious virtues and could easily subject it to the whims of his aged mother".[3] A similar impact of the religious beliefs of the early imperial Guptas on their political ideology, therefore, becomes an interesting possibility.

The early imperial Guptas were orthodox, though liberal Hindu rulers, a product of the Brāhmaṇa culture-area and the Brāhmaṇical revival of third-fourth century A.D.[4] They symbolised the tendency of rapprochement between the Vedic and the devotional schools of thought. In that respect they were the product of their age [5]. It would be quite reasonable, therefore, to expect that in the matters of war and politics also their thinking was influenced by the political thoughts and ideas which their society cherished. Let us, therefore, analyse the thoughts bearing on these subjects in the *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya, the *Mahābhārata*, the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* and the early Purāṇas and such other works which were popular in the contemporary society or have preserved a picture of the thought-currents of that period, and try to find out how far the policies followed by them were in consonance with them. For example the supporter of the real truth of the Śāstras (*śāstra-tattv-ārtha-bhartuḥ*), a firm believer in the path shown by the Vedas (*addheyaḥ-sūkta-mārggaḥ*) and a Kavirāja as Samudragupta was,[6] he must have studied these classics and, therefore, our endeavour may not prove altogether futile. It may at least give an indirect glimpse of his psychology, something which the students of ancient Indian history get in the cases of only a few kings.

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[1] Beal, S., *Si-yu-ki* or *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, trans. from the Chinese of Hiuan-Tsiang, Vol.I, reprinted, Delhi, 1969, p.168.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp.169ff.

[3] Goyal, S.R., *A History of the Imperial Guptas*, Allahabad, 1967, p.354.

[4] *Ibid.*, pp.62ff. For the view that the Guptas were Brāhmaṇas, also present author's paper in *Parishad-Patrikā*, Year 25, Vol.2, pp.74-80.

War was a recognised institution in ancient India. The society had created a separate class, that of the Kshatriyas, whose business in life was to fight wars. Perhaps no other single event produced a deeper and more lasting influence on the mind of our ancients than the Bhārata War and perhaps no other literary work acquired greater popularity than the *Mahābhārata* in which the story of the Great War was narrated. It is true that the concept of non-violence, as opposed to the glorification of war, was ever present and, largely due to the great ascetical movements of Jainism and Buddhism, became a vital force in the thinking of the country. But on the whole it was treated more on individual than social plane. For example Kauṭilya, the greatest political thinker of ancient India, advocates no ethical principles in the matters of war and foreign policy, but is content to rest his whole philosophy on the grounds of expediency. According to him a king who thinks himself superior in strength to his prospective enemy " shall wage war " and a king who is desirous of enlarging his kingdom should take an advantage of the weakness of his enemies.This sentiment is almost invariably echoed in the law books.The *Mānava Dharmaśāstra*, for example, concedes to the king the right to declare war when he feels that his army is strong and his kingdom prosperous, and reverse is the case with opponents.

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[5] For a wider evaluation of Samudragupta, see Goyal, S.R., *Samudragupta Parākramāṅka*, Meerut, 1987. Goyal's work on this Gupta monarch is definitely more comprehesive than that of B.G. Gokhale, and incorporates the results of his own well-known researches on Gupta history. Also see my articles, 'Samudragupta', forthcoming in the *Prāchya-Pratibhā*, and 'Gupta Itihāsa Lekhana meṅ Navīna Pravṛttiyān', in *Professor Lallanji Gopal Felicitation Volume*, (ed.) T.P. Verma.

[6] Goyal, S.R., *Guptakālīna Abhilekha*, Meerut, 1984, pp.20-21, 44.

Thus, it is apparent that the ancient Hindu thinkers regarded war as the legitimate business of kings and sought no more justification for it than his ability to do so. However, they usually insisted that the conqueror should not hanker after the territory of the vanquished; he should remain content only with the acknowledgement of his superior prowess. The *Mahābhārata* indicates a position wherein it would condone war if it is waged for *dharmavijaya* and not for *asuravijaya*. Kauṭilya declares that there are three kinds of conquerors, viz. *dharmavijayī* (who is satisfied with mere submission or obeisance), *lobhavijayī* (who is satisfied with gain in land and money) and *asuravijayī* (who is not satisfied with land and money only but robs the defeated king of his son, wife and life). The *Nītivākyāmṛta* defines the three almost in the same words. Further, the ancient authorities usually prescribe that if the defeated king is alive he should be re-instated on the throne. If not, the dead king's son or some kingsman should be installed. The conqueror should not uproot the defeated royal family, although some texts allow him to do so if it is of ignoble birth. It shows that in the case of *dharmavijaya* the conquered state retained its own king, institutions and organisation of government. The Buddhists no doubt carried this idea into moral and spiritual sphere and transformed it into the concept of conquest through morality, perhaps largely due to the influence of Aśoka, but for the Hindu theorists it continued to have secular connotation. The descriptions of the *digvijayas* of Pāṇḍu, Arjuna and the other Pāṇḍava brothers show that there was no aggrandizement by acquiring fresh territory but all that was desired was to make other kings submit or offer presents. In the *Raghuvaṁśa*, Raghu is said to have followed the policy of *dharmavijaya* in Kaliṅga. Viewed in the light of this tradition it appears that except for in the case of the kings of Āryāvarta, who where violently exterminated, Samudragupta by and large conformed to the ancient ideal of *dharmavijaya*. When he liberated and re-instated the kings of Dakshinṇāpatha, after having captured them, he was following this policy. In the case of the *pratyanta* kingdoms and tribal states also he was content only with the payment of tribute and the acceptance of his overlordship by them.

Towards the foreign potentates of the North-West and the 'dwellers of all islands' he adopted a still milder policy. Further, in the spirit of an ideal Hindu ruler he claims that his "tranquil fame, pervading the whole earth, was generated by establishing (again) many royal families, fallen and deprived of sovereignty" and that his "officers were always employed in restoring the wealth of the various kings who had been conquered by the strength of his arms."[7] Incidentally it may also be noted that nowhere does he mention the causes which compelled him to take military action against his various adversaries. Did he agree with Kauṭilya and Manu that a king who is comparatively stronger than his enemies "shall wage war" against them?

The ancient Indian theory of imperialism found its highest extension in the concept of world-ruler, the origin of which goes back to the Vedic period. In the early Vedic literature the words *ekarāṭ, sārvabhauma, samrāj* and *adhirāja* are used in their literal sense and a clear distinction between a king and emperor is made. Other epithets frequently used in the later literature to imply universal sovereignty are *mahārājādhirāja, rājarāja, viśvarāja, paramabhaṭṭāraka, chaturanteśa,* etc. Many of these had other meanings as well and were often used, especially in the early medieval period without much justification. The most significant word for the world-conqueror, however, was *chakravartī* (Pali *chakkavattī*). The term is as old as the *Maitrī Upanishad.* In the Buddhist canonical texts it became, like the concept of *dharmavijaya,* intimately connected with the idea of righteous ruler, perhaps mainly due to the inspiration given by the reforms of Aśoka. But the orthodox Hindu thinkers continued to interpret it in secular terms. Kauṭilya defines the *chakravartī-kshetra* or the sphere of influence of a *chakravartī* as the territory on the earth spreading from the sea to the Himalayas, which is a thousand *yojanas* in extent when measured in a straight line. The same idea occurs in the *Kāvya Mīmāṁsā* of Rājaśekhara. The *Amarakośa* states that a king before whom all feudatories humble themselves is styled *adhīśvara, chakravartī* and *sārvabhauma* i.e. these words are synonymous. According to Kshīrasvāmī *chakravartī* means "one who wields lordship over a circle (*chakra*) of kings" or "one who makes the circle (*chakra*) abide by his orders."

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[7] *Ibid.*, p.21.

Till the beginning of the Gupta age, the *chakravartī* ideal was connected with the performance of the Vedic sacrifices. The Aśvamedha was performed not only to extend and confirm the sovereignty of the performer, but also for going to the heaven or attainment of a son or as a ceremony of expiation for such sins as might have been committed in the prosecution of a war of conquest or as a symbol of success at the end of one's career. Samudragupta's sacrifice most probably belonged to the last category. However, as he was the first Indian ruler, after the Mauryas, to carve out an empire comprising almost the whole of *chakravartī kshetra*, he performed the horse-sacrifice of elaborate (*chirotsanna*) type, and not its abbreviated form which was current in those days. Later on Kumāragupta I also performed an Aśvamedha to assert his *chakravartī* status.

In the Gupta age the conception of a *chakravartī* ruler, performing *digvijaya*, that is to say conquering 'the whole earth', was very popular and was given a Vaishṇavite orientation. In the *Vāyu Purāṇa*,[8] for instance, it has been stated that "the chakravartīs are born in each age as the essence of Vishṇu. They have lived in the ages past and will come again in future. "Strength, Dharma, happiness and wealth, these wondorous blessings shall characterise these rulers. They will enjoy wealth, plenty, Dharma, ambition, fame and victory in undisturbed harmony. They will excel the Ṛishis in their power to achieve results, by their lordliness, by providing plenty and by discipline. And they will excel the gods, demons and men by their strength and self-discipline."[9]

On these lines the influence of the imperial Guptas and of their age is quite distinct. As opposed to the Vākāṭakas and the Bhāraśivas, who were the worshippers of Śiva, the god of destruction and social asceticism, who though a giver keeps no wealth, possesses no material splendour and who is austere and sombre, the Guptas invoked Vishṇu, the king amongst gods, whose emblem is *chakra*—the symbol of imperial dominion—and who is lord of prosperity and growth. The adoption of this cult by a galaxy of great rulers was bound to affect, in turn, the political thinking of the period. Perhaps the author of the lines quoted above, who appears to have been a Bhāgavata, wanted to bring the ideal of *chakravartī* rulers in tune with the polity of the times.[10]

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[8] *Vāyu Purāṇa*, XLVII. 72-76.

[9] Majumdar, .R.C., *The Classical Age*, Bombay, 1962, Foreword, p.x.

[10] Goyal, S.R., *HIG*, p.136.

The connection of the early Gupta emperors with the new Vaishṇavite interpretation of the *chakravartī* ideal is almost conclusively established by the unique Chakravikrama type of coin of Chandragupta II. On the obverse of this coin, which was yielded by the Bayana hoard, is shown, inside a big *chakra*, a standing two-armed male figure conferring three round balls on a haloed royal figure in front of him. The reverse shows the figure of Lakshmī standing on a lotus and the legend *Chakravikrama*. It is now almost unanimously believed that the figure inside the *chakra* represents the *Chakrapurusha* or Vishṇu who is bestowing on Chandragupta II three symbols of royal power, viz., *prabhu-śakti, utsāha-śakti* and *mantra-śakti* i.e. the kingly virtues of authority, energy and counsel.[11] The symbology of this scene becomes clearer in the light of the data provided by the *Ahirbudhnya Saṁhitā*, a well-known text of the Pāñcharātra Āgama which 'on the basis of the internal evidence bearing on the religious conditions portrayed in it should be assigned to the Gupta period'.[12] From it we learn that Vishṇu in the form of *Chakra* was held as the ideal of worship for kings desirous of obtaining universal sovereignty. In the words of V.S. Agrawala, it was "a novel and dynamic interpretation compatible with the polity of the times. Acccording to the explanation given in the *Saṁhitā*, the human figure inside the *Chakra* is called *Chakravartī* both by the people and the wisemen. The king who worships him with a devout heart atttains to the rank of a *Chakravartī* ruler in a short time. Those who wish a greater glory (*vipulaṁ śriyam*) should worship the *Chakravartī Purusha*, but specially is this worship enjoined on kings. It was a new conception by which the Pāñcharātra Bhāgavatas utilized the tenets of their religion in the service of the state and thereby greatly influenced the political thought and ideals of kingly power during that period."[13] The *Ahirbudhnya Saṁhitā* clearly states that he who adores the *Chakra Purusha* becomes a Sārvabhauma or Universal Ruler in this world and also becomes a ruler in the other world. Any one who does not pay homage to this deity cannot attain to kingship.[14] It is indeed a welcome addition to our knowledge of the political philosophy of the early imperial Guptas. It is difficult not to believe that Samudragupta, who was himself a great devotee of Vishṇu and was responsible for the adoption of Garuḍa, the *vāhana* of Vishṇu as the emblem of his dynasty, himself subscribed to this new ideology. At least this much cannot be denied that Samudragupta aspired and claimed to be a *chakravartī* ruler. The lists of the kings who were uprooted or subjugated by him make it obvious that with the exception of the western Deccan and perhaps western India, he brought almost the whole of the traditional *Chakravartī Kshetra* under his control. Further, his fame has been mentioned as 'caused by his conquest of the whole world' (*sarva-pṛthivī-vijaya-janita*) and he himself has been given the credit of 'binding together of the whole world, by means of the amplitude of the vigour of his arm' (*bāhu-vīryya-prasara-dharaṇi-bandhasya*). His comparison with Dhanada (Kubera, lord of wealth, guardian of the north), Varuṇa (the Indian sea-god, guardian of the west), Indra (king of celestials and guardian of the east), and Antaka (Yama, guardian of the south) is apposite and possibly refers to his conquests in the four directions (*digvijaya*).

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[11] Altekar, A.S., *The Coinage of the Gupta Empire*, Varanasi, 1957, pp.147ff.; Shivaramamurti, *JNSI*, XIII, Pt.II, pp.180ff.; Agrawala, V.S., *JNSI*, XVI, Pt.I, pp.97ff.

[12] Agrawala, *op.cit.*, p.97.

[13] *Ibid.*, p.99f.

[14] *Ibid.*

The Vaishṇavite political ideology of Samudragupta becomes more explicit from an analysis of the epithets used for him in lines 24 and 25 of the Prayāga *praśasti*. Towards the end of line 24 Samudragupta has been described as *Pṛthivyāmapratirathaḥ*. This *biruda* has been variously interpreted by scholars. Fleet,[15] and following him R.C. Majumdar[16] and some others[17] translate, it as 'who had no antagonist (of equal power) in the world'. However, B.Ch. Chhabra[18] has rightly drawn attention to the fact that in the verse 68 of the *Vishṇusahasranāma* Apratirtha is given as a name of Vishṇu. This *stotra* forms a part of the *Mahābhārata* and as such must have existed in the early Gupta age. It is also quite likely that it was held in high esteem in the Gupta family. Commenting on the epithet *Apratirathaḥ* used for Samudragupta and Chandragupta II in the light of this text Chhabra observes: "the epithet *Apratiratha*, so far as the imeprial Gupta family is concerned, is known to have been borne by only two members, namely Samudragupta and his son Chandragupta II. In the case of the former, it is qualified by the adjunct *pṛithivyām*, while in that of the latter it is distinguished by *svayam* prefixed to it. Taking each independently, there can be no objection, in the case of Samudragupta, to its being translated as Fleet has done. In the case of Chandragupta II, however, it has to be rendered only as 'Apratiratha incarnate.' "[19] For here the word *svayam* stands for what is more commonly denoted by *sākshāt*, meaning 'personified' or 'incarnate'. This is what is intended in the phrase *svayaṁ ch=āpratirathaḥ*. "It follows from this that the term *apratiratha* in this case has to be taken as a substantive and not as an adjective. It is here that the *Vishṇusahasranāma* showed me the light and dispelled all my doubt. For I found therein that Apratiratha figures as one of the thousand names of the God Vishṇu."[20] With this clue in hand, we can unhesitatingly translate the phrase *svayaṁ ch=āpratirathaḥ* as "and who was Apratiratha incarnate." And if that is so, even Samudragupta's epithet *pṛthivyām=apratirathaḥ* may also be rendered as '(*the veriest*) Apratiratha (*moving*) on earth'.

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[15] Fleet, J.F., *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol.III (Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings and their Successors), Varanasi, 1963, p.14.

[16] Majumdar, R.C. (ed.), *Comprehensive History of India*, Vol.III, Pt.I, New Delhi, 1981, p.29.

[17] *E.g.* Pande, V.C., *JIH*, LI, Pt.II, pp.345-48.

[18] *JNSI*, IX, pp.137ff.

The suggestion of Chhabra, as he himself points out, accords well with the known history of the Guptas. Firstly in line 28 of the Prayāga *praśasti* Harisheṇa actually describes Samudragupta as a god living on earth, who could be called human only because of his following human conventions (*Loka-samaya-kriy=ānuvidhāna-mātra-mānushasya loka-dhāmno devasya*). Secondly, it may be noted that though in some inscriptions the epithet *Apratirathaḥ* is applied to both Samudragupta and his son Chandragupta II, but so far as coins are concerned, it has been used in connection with Samudragupta alone. The Archer type of his gold coins[21] has, on the reverse, the simple legend *Apratirathaḥ* and on the obverse, in addition to the name *Samudra* without any case ending (engraved vertically) the metrical legend: *Apratiratho vijitya kshitiṁ sucharitair=divaṁ jayati*. "It may now readily be admitted that *Apratiratha* stands here as a substantive and not as a mere adjective. Plainly the personality of Apratiratha (Vishṇu) is superimposed (*adhyāropita*, as it may be termed in Sanskrit poetics) on Samudragupta, who is thus presented to us as an embodiment of Vishṇu.... Harisheṇa, the author of the inscription, seems to have inlaid, as it were, his elaborate composition with astute hints that would indeed make his master appear as the very Vishṇu on earth."[22]

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[19] *Op.cit.*

[20] *Ibid.*, p.138.

[21] Allan, J., *Catalogue of the Coins of the Gupta Dynasties and of Śaśāṅka, King of Gauḍa (in the British Museum)*, London, 1914, pp.6-7.

[22] Chhabra. B.Ch., *op.cit.*, p.145.

Another indicator of the Vaishṇava influence on Samudragupta is the epithet *Achintya* used for him in line 25 of the Prayāga *praśasti.* As Chhabra has pointed out *Achintya* is again a name of Vishṇu known from the *Vishṇusahasranāma* (verse 89).

The most remarkable evidence regarding the influence of the Vaishṇavite ideology on Samudragupta's political thinking is in the form of his description as *sādh-vasādhūdaya-pralaya-hetu purushasya* which instantly reminds one of the well-known declaration of Lord Kṛshṇa in the *Gītā* (IV.8):

Paritrāṇāya sādhūnām vināśāya cha dushkṛtām/
Dharmasaṁsthāpanārthāya sambhavāmi yuge yuge//

It not only shows that Samudragupta was acquainted with the Song Celestial, but also proves that he was very deeply influenced by it and conceived himself in the role of the Lord, as the destroyer of the evil-doers and protector of the virtuous.

Thus it is obvious that Samudragupta not only claimed *chakravartī* status by virtue of being a performer of *chirotsanna* (elaborate) Aśvamedha as the Vedic chakravartīs did, but also claimed this status by projecting himself as 'the veriest Apratiratha (Vishṇu) moving on the earth', Achintya, a god living on earth who could be called human only because of his following human conventions and the very Lord who incarnates himself to protect the virtuous and destroy the evil-doers. In a way he was fulfilling the promise made in the Purāṇas that chakravartīs are born in each age as the essence of Vishṇu. Chandragupta II, the son of Samudragupta, claimed the same status of a chakravartī when he projected himself as *sākshāt Apratiratha* (Vishṇu). His own son Kumāragupta I also performed an Aśvamedha and on the lion slayer type of his gold coins declared himself to be *sākshāt Narasiṁha* that is Vishṇu in his Man-Lion aspect. Obviously all these three early Gupta emperors were influenced by the Vaishṇavite political thinking of their age.

17

Kumārāmātya – A Reappraisal[1]

Kiran Kumar Thaplyal

The term *kumārāmātya* occurs first in the epigraphic records of the Gupta period and was continued in use for centuries later after the Guptas, by different dynasties—imperial or regional. It is curious that the term does not find mention in the ancient works on polity, or for that matter in any literary text. The interpretation of the term is baffling and one scholar has gone to the extent of calling it 'mysterious'.[1a]

Kumārāmātyas have been variously compared with other officials of ancient administration by different scholars. Altekar at one place considers them similar to the *amātyas* of the Maurya-Sātavāhana administration[2] and at another with *amātyas* of the Pallava period.[3] Sircar too at one place takes them as similar to the *amātyas* of the Sātavāhana administration[4] and at another to *kumāramahāpātra* of medieval Orissan inscriptions.[5] Raychaudhuri compares them with such *mahāmātras* of Aśokan times as were attached to *kumāras*.[6]

On the basis of the two constituents of the term, *kumāra* and *amātya*, the interpretations could be: (1) a junior minister,[7] (2) 'prince's minister',[8] (3) 'prince as minister',[9] (4) 'minister in charge of princes',[10]

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[1] We have discussed this term earlier in *Bhāratī*, XII-XIV, pp.307-19 and in *Studies in Ancient Indian Seals*, pp.103ff. The paper was read in a Seminar held under the auspices of the Dept. of A.I.H. Culture and Archaeology, Gorakhpur University.

[1a] Dikshitar, V.R.R., *Gupta Polity*, p.152.

[2] Altekar, A.S., *State and Government in Ancient India*, 2nd ed., p.339.

[3] Altekar, in *The Vākāṭaka-Gupta Age*, p.282.

[4] Sircar, D.C., *Select Inscriptions*, p.268, n.1.

[5] Sircar, D.C., *Indian Epigraphy*, p.358, n.2.

[6] Raychaudhuri, H.C., *Political History of Ancient India*, 6th ed., p.390 n.

[7] Raychaudhuri, *ibid.*, pp.562-63 and n2. He writes, 'the more probable view is that the term *Kumāra* in the expression *Kumārāmātya* corresponds to *Pina*, *Chikka*, *Immadi*, *Ilaya* of the south and is the opposite of *Peda* (*Prauḍha*), *Piriya*.'

[8] Bloch, T., *ASIAR*, 1903-04, p.107; Fleet, *CII*, III, p.16n; Beni Prasad, *State in Ancient India*, pp.296, 437; Hiranand Sastri, *MASI*, 66, p.35; Ghoshal, *Studies in Indian History and Culture*, p.447.

[9] Thaplyal, K.K., *Studies in Ancient Indian Seals*, p.107.

[10] Vaidya, C.V., *History of Mediaeval Hindu India*, I, p.138.

(5) 'minister whose father was alive',[11] (6) 'minister since youth',[12] and (7) 'an *amātya* of the status of prince'.[13]

Let us now put forth the evidence bearing on the nature and duties of the *kumārāmātyas* and then ascertain as to which of the above-mentioned interpretations, if at all, could be more acceptable. A *kumārāmātya* could be appointed as the head of a city (*vide* seal-legend *Tīrakumārāmātyādhikaraṇasya*)[14] or a *vishaya*[15] and *bhukti* (*vide* seal-legends *Magadhabhuktau kumārāmātyādhikaraṇasya*[16] and *Nagarabhuktau kumārāmātyādhikaraṇasya*).[17] He could be attached to a *mahādaṇḍanāyaka* (*vide* the seal-legend *Mahādaṇḍanāyaka Vishṇurakshite pādānugṛhite kumārāmātyādhikaraṇasya*),[18] or the heir-apparent (*Yuvarājapādīya kumārāmātyādhikaraṇasya*),[19] or the king (*Śrīparamabhaṭṭārakapādīya kumārāmātyādhikaraṇasya*).[20] A *kumārāmātya* could also hold the office of a *sāndhivigrahika* and *mahādaṇḍanāyaka*[21] or a *mantrī*.[22] He could also be assigned some special responsibility, as, for example, safeguarding the sacred tank of the Lichchhavis at Vaiśālī (*vide* seal-legend *Vaiśālī vāma kuṇḍe kumārāmātyādhikaraṇasya*).[23] Sometimes even a feudatory chief (*mahārāja*) could be appointed as *kumārāmātya*.[24]

Let us assess the various interpretations of the term *kumārāmātya* given above, in the light of this evidence. Logically, a *kumārāmātya* who held the office of the *sāndhivigrahika* and *Mahādaṇḍanāyaka* could not possibly be a 'junior minister' nor could he be a prince's minister'. Since Śikharasvāmī and his son Pṛthvīsheṇa, who had the designation of *kumārāmātya* were Brāhmaṇas[25] and certainly not princes, the interpretation 'prince as minister' does not hold good. A *kumārāmātya* who was attached to a *mahāśvapati-mahādaṇḍanāyaka*, or the one who was assigned the charge of a sacred tank at Vaiśālī could not be a 'minister in charge of princes'.

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[11] *Political History of Ancient India*, p.562n.

[12] Bloch, *kumārādārabhya amātyaḥ*, 'one who has been in the service of king from the time when he was a boy' (*EI*, X, p.50n.); Altekar, *State and Government in Ancient India*, p.339.

[13] Jayaswal, K.P., *JBORS*, XVII, p.399.

[14] Basarh sealing, *ASIAR*, 1903-04, p.109, no.22. Bhandarkar takes *Tīra* for *Tīrabhukti* (*CII*, III, rev. ed., p.91).

[15] *Vide* Damodarpur Copper-plates, *EI*, XV, pp.130ff.; Baigram Copper-plates, *EI*, XXI, pp.81-82.

[16] *MASI*, 66, p.51.

[17] *Studies in Ancient Indian Seals*, p.104.

[18] Bhita sealing, *ASIAR*, 1911-12, p.52, no.32.

[19] Basarh sealing, *ASIAR*, 1903-04, p.107, no.5.

[20] Basarh sealing, *ASIAR*, 1903-04, p.108, no.8.

[21] Fleet, J.F., *CII*, III, no.1.

[22] *EI*, X, pp.71-72.

[23] Bhandarkar, D.R., *CII*, III, rev. ed., pp.90-91. Spooner read the legend as *Vesālināmakuṇḍe*—*ASIAR*, 1913-14, p.109.

[24] *Vide* Amauna Copper-plate, *EI*, X, p.50.

Such interpretation of the term as 'one who has been a minister since youth'[26] or 'an officer who has been a companion to the king when he was a prince', or a 'minister whose father is alive' are literally possible, but it is difficult to believe that a whole cadre of officials was formed and designated as such.

Dikshitar felt that the etymological meaning of the two components of the term—*kumāra* and *amātya*—do not help us in understanding the nature of the office of *kumārāmātya*, and suggested that it was a specific designation of a class of officials and had nothing to do with *kumāra* and *amātya*.[27] In our view, the term *kumārāmātya* refers to a class of *amātyas* who, in recognition of their meritorious services, seniority, etc. were granted certain privileges enjoyed by the royal princes. Like modern central services officials, they were appointed in various capacities in cities, districts, provinces, and at the centre. As regards the evidence of the Amauna copper-plate, it has been rightly pointed out that Nandana, as feudatory chieftain, was 'also a *kumārāmātya* in the court of his overlord', and that '...when he made the grant, he must have been in his own territory, retaining and mentioning with pride the titular position he had attained'.[28]

Ghoshal holds that the rank of a *kumārāmātya* was different from (and in fact inferior to) that of a *mantrin* (the minister proper) as indicated by the joint title *mantrī-kumārāmātya*.[29] But it may be noted that the same scholar has translated the passage *sāndhivigrahika-kumārāmātya-mahādaṇḍanāyaka* as *sāndhivigrahika*, *kumārāmātya*, and *mahādaṇḍanāyaka*.[30] Bhandarkar opines that the officials in the Maliya copper-plate inscription are mentioned in the ascending order 'from which it is clear that *kumārāmātya* occupies the highest rank in this list, and is therefore higher in rank than *Rājasthānīya* who corresponds to the *uparika* or Divisional Commissioner of the early Gupta age...'[31] But the criterion of seniority based on the precedence in the mentioning of officials does not stand valid since we have the example of Bihar Stone Pillar Inscription in which the *uparika* precedes *kumārāmātya*.[32]

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[25] See Karamdanda Stone Inscription, Bhandarkar, *CII*, III, pp.280-82.

[26] Bloch, *kumārādārabhya amātyaḥ* (*EI*, X, p.50n.); Altekar, *State and Government in Ancient India*, p.339. The latter thinks that it could mean as one who was an *amātya* since the time of joining service (*ibid.*, p.339). Cf. the expression *kumārādhyāpaka* 'a teacher while still a youth' (Monier Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, or *kumāra-sevaka*, 'one who has been a servant since youth) (*Political History of Ancient India*, p.523n.).

[27] *Gupta Polity*, p.152.

[28] Bhandarkar, *CII*, III, p.92. Earlier we had suggested that Nandana was a *kumārāmātya* who later rose to the rank of a *mahārāja* (*Studies in Ancient Indian Seals*, p.110).

[29] Ghoshal, U.N., *op.cit.*, p.449.

D.R. Bhandarkar[33] considers the expression *Sāndhivigrahika-kumārāmātya* in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta and *mantrī-kumārāmātya* in the Karamadanda Inscription as indicating 'a *kumārāmātya* acting as a *sāndhivigrahika*, and a *kumārāmātya* acting as a counsellor respectively.' Be it noted, however, that Bhandarkar himself translates elsewhere the expressions as *Sāndhivigrahika-kumārāmātya* to mean *sāndhivigrahika* and *kumārāmātya*.[34]

Taking into consideration the fact that a *kumārāmātya* could be given important assignments at district, province and central levels, Altekar suggested that *kumārāmātya* was a cadre like present day I.C.S or I.A.S.[35] But the learned scholar contradicts himself when he adds that the post of a *mahābalādhikṛta* or *mahādaṇḍanāyaka* was higher one than that of a *kumārāmātya* as according to the evidence of Karamadanda Inscription Kumārāmātya Pṛthvīsheṇa was promoted to it after some approved service.[36] But this observation of his would make *kumārāmātya* a post, rather than a cadre.

R.D. Banerji took *pādīya* to mean 'equal to' and interpreted *yuvarājapādīya* and *bhaṭṭārakapādīya kumārāmātya* as equal in rank to *yuvarāja* and 'king' respectively.[36a] It is, however, unthinkable that an official could be considered equal in rank to the king during the Gupta age (to which period the evidence belongs) when an official bearing the designations *sāndhivigrahika*, *kumārāmātya* and *mahādaṇḍanāyaka* describes himself as the humble servant of the king.[37] *Pādīya* should be taken to mean 'attached to' or 'subordinate to'. Obviously the said *kumārāmātyas* were attached to the *yuvarāja* and king respectively.

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[30] *Ibid.*, p.446.

[31] Bhandarkar, *CII*, III, p.92.

[32] Bihar Stone Pillar Inscription, Bhandakar, *CII*, III, p.348. But in the Deo-Barnark Inscription of Jīvitagupta (Fleet, *CII*, III, No.46, p.216) and the Banskhera plate of Harsha (*EI*, IV, p.211) *kumārāmātya* precedes *uparika*.

[33] Bhandarkar, *CII*, III, p.91.

[34] *Ibid.*, p.220.

[35] Altekar in *The Vākāṭaka-Gupta Age*, p.282.

[36] *Ibid.*

[36a] R.D. Banerji, *Age of the Imperial Guptas*, p.73.

There is a suggestion that the term *kumārāmātya* probably refers to one who had a hereditary right to the high office of the state.[38] Heredity appointments to high offices have been advocated by some ancient writers on polity and the Karamadanda inscription[39] does bear an example of both father (Śikharasvāmin) and son (Pṛthvīsheṇa) being designated as *kumārāmātya*. But the former's father, Kumāravyabhaṭa, was an *āchārya* and, in all probability, did not hold any office whatsoever.

Dikshitar tries to assess the nature and function of the office of *kumārāmātya* on the basis of the associated devices. Since the *kumārāmātya* seals bear the device of Gajalakshmī, the deity symbolic of riches, he suggests that the *kumārāmātyas* were in charge of treasuries variously of the king, the crown prince and the local administration.[40] But, be it noted, Gajalakshmī had been a very popular motif and also occurs on seals of the offices of *uparika*,[41] *vishaya*[42] and others.[43] Besides, a *kumārāmātya* who was appointed as caretaker of the sacred tank at Vaiśālī, or the one attached to the *mahāśvapati-mahādaṇḍa nāyaka* could hardly be incharge of treasuries.

It has also been suggested that *kumārāmātyas* were essentially district officers. Thus, Basak holds that even *yuvarājapādīya* and *bhaṭṭārakapādīya kumārāmātyas* were also district officials.[44] He surmises that the region of Vaiśālī (the find-spot of such seals) was earlier directly under King Chandragupta II, and hence a *kumārāmātya* who was head of the district was called *bhaṭṭārakapādīya*. Later, in his opinion, prince Govindagupta (who is mentioned as *mahārāja* on a Vaiśālī seal) was appointed as head of that province. The *kumārāmātya* was then designated *yuvarājapādīya kumārāmātya*.[45]

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[37] Fleet, *CII*, III, pp.9-10.

[38] Majumdar and Basak in *History of Bengal*, I, p.312.

[39] *EI*, X, pp.71-72.

[40] Dikshitar, *Gupta Polity*, p.157.

[41] *ASIAR*, 1903-04, p.109.

[42] *JRAS*, 1914, p.401; *MASI*, 66, p.49.

[43] *CII*, III, no.40, p.191, pl.XXVI.

[44] Basak, *HNEI*, p.311.

[45] Here we may also refer to the view of B.C. Sen on this point. He writes, '...the administration of a province was generally regarded as a matter principally reserved for a *kumāra*. Consequently, those who were to be appointed as *vishayapatis* were usually recruited from the rank of *kumārāmātyas*.' (*Some Historical Aspects of Bengal Inscriptions*, p.530).

It is likely that like the I.A.S. officers, normally the *kumārāmātyas* were initially appointed as head of a district or on other important posts within it. They could be promoted as heads of *bhuktis*, or given assignments at central levels. Besides, according to need they could be attached to high officials like *mahāśvapati-mahādaṇḍanāyaka*, or *yuvarāja*, or to the king himself. Thus, the *kumārāmātyas* cannot be regarded as essentially district officials.

The Baigram copper-plate[46] clearly shows that a *vishayapati*, who was also a *kumārāmātya* was appointed by king. The Indore copper-plate inscription of Skandagupta[47] also indicates that the *vishayapati* was appointed by the king. But there is a difference of opinion regarding the evidence of the Damodarpur copper-plate inscription[48] on this point. R.D. Banerji,[49] R.G. Basak,[50] and D.C. Sircar[51] are of the view that the evidence of the plates shows that *vishayapati*, who also had the designation of *kumārāmātya*, was appointed by the *uparika*. But according to Bhandarkar,[52] in the case of these plates, "the power of appointment which the *Uparika* possessed was with reference, not to the *Vishayapati*, but to the President of the District Town Board to which office he could appoint anybody—a *Kumārāmātya*, *Āyuktaka* or *Vishayapati*. Here the wording is not *tat-pāda-parigṛhīta* but *tan-niyuktaka*."

V.S. Agrawala[53] suggests that a "*kumārāmātya* was a personal title conferred on the highest dignitary by the king, like a minister, a commander, a member of the royal household. This would mean that *kumārāmātya* was not an office in itself. But there are some seals which bear the legend *kumārāmātyādhikaraṇasya* (i.e. 'seal of the office of *kumārāmātya*) only.[54] In such legends neither the name of the *kumārāmātya* is mentioned nor is he connected with any other official titles. This would show that *kumārāmātya* was an official title and not a personal one. But in such cases what would be the nature of his office ? According to Bhandarkar[55] the evidence of the Damodarpur plates shows that *kumārāmātya* was in charge of *adhishṭhānādhikaraṇa* appointed by an *uparika*. "There he was in charge of the Land Records and Settlement Office of the District Town. Probably he had to discharge this function when he was not in charge of any specific duty and had to work simply as *kumārāmātya*." In our view, when not assigned any specific job, the position of a *kumārāmātya* was something like that of a 'minister without portfolio'; but he could very well have an office of his own even in that capacity.

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[46] *EI*, XXI, pp.81ff.

[47] Bhandarkar, *CII*, III, pp.308ff.

[48] *EI*, XV, pp.130ff.

[49] *The Age of the Imperial Guptas*, pp.77-78.

[50] Basak, *HNEI*, p.190.

[51] *Select Inscriptions*, 2nd ed., p.291 n.6.

[52] Bhandarkar, *CII*, III, pp.93-94.

[53] *JAOS*, LXXXVI, no.2, pp.67-75.

[54] *ASIAR*, 1903-04, p.107, no.3; *MASI*, 66, p.52, Pl.V. 1. etc.

[55] Bhandarkar, *CII*, III, p.91.

Bhandarkar translates the seal-legend *Tīrakumārāmātyādhikaraṇasya* as 'Office of *kumārāmātya* in charge of Tīra (Division=*bhukti*)' and pointedly adds: "He could not have been the governor of the province" which post was held by an *Uparika* (*vide*, for example, the seal-legend *Tīrabhuktyuparikādhikaraṇasya*).[56] But from legends like *Magadhabhuktau kumārāmātyādhikaraṇasya*[57] and *Nagarabhuktau kumārāmātyādhikaraṇasya*[58] on Nālandā seals, we infer that at times a *kumārāmātya* could be appointed as head of a *bhukti*. There seems to have been a good deal of elasticity in the administrative set-up and at times more than one category of officials could be appointed to perform similar or even identical jobs. Possibly, in some cases, due to political or administrative exigencies, the districts did not form part of the *bhuktis* and were directly governed by the centre. The *vishayapatis* in such cases were directly appointed by the king. But when a *vishaya* formed part of a *bhukti* then the *uparika* could appoint a *vishayapati*. Possibly, the office of a *vishaya* was normally called *vishayādhikaraṇa*. But when the *vishaya* was headed by a *kumārāmātya*, it was called *kumārāmātyādhikaraṇa*. Similarly, a *bhukti* office was rightly called *uparikādhikaraṇa* when headed by an *uparika* but the same would be referred to as *kumārāmātyādhikaraṇa* when headed by a *kumārāmātya*.

Jayaswal[59] drew attention of scholars to a passage in the *Pratijñā yaugandharāyaṇa* of Bhāsa where we read about the wish of the king to honour his minister by according him a welcome befitting a prince (*kumāravidhiviśishṭena satkāreṇa...praveśyatāmāmtya iti*). Though the passage may merely be taken to mean that the *amātya* was accorded an extraordinary welcome, Jayaswal's suggestion that the *amātya* was raised to the rank of a prince seems to be correct. Thus Bhāsa (c.

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[56] *Ibid.*

[57] *MASI*, 66, p.51.

[58] Thaplyal, *Studies in Ancient Indian Seals*, p.104.

[59] *JBORS*, XVII, p.399.

second or third century A.D.)[60] knew of a category of *amātyas* who were given the status of the *kumāras*. But, it seems, no specific nomenclature was given to such *amātyas* in his time. It was during the rule of the imperial Guptas that a class of *amātyas* came to be designated *kumārāmātyas*. They were appointed at various levels of administrative set up. But at whichever level and in whichever capacity they served, they enjoyed the honour and privileges of the princes. Quite likely their emoluments also were equal to those of princes. The designation (*kumārāmātya*) was continued during the post-Gupta period. But with the trend of times the title was made more grandiloquent, *mahākumārāmātya*, as met with in the Pāla epigraphs,[61] where it is mentioned along with *rājāmātya* and other officials. By this time the nature and functions of *kumārāmātya* had undergone considerable changes. Apparently, the term *kumārāmātya* by this time came to be understood as an *amātya* attached to a *kumāra* (prince), it being forgotten that a *kumārāmātya* could earlier be also attached to the king. For *amātyas* attached to the king, a new cadre was created and designated as *rājāmātya*, a term not met with in the epigraphs of the Gupta period. Obviously, in this case the status of *kumārāmātya* would have been lower than that of the *rājāmātya*.

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[60] *The Age of Imperial Unity*, p.261.

[61] See, e.g., *IA*, XV, p.306; Bhandarkar, *CII*, III, p.92.

18

Some Reflections on the Vīṇā in Gupta Coinage

Mukund Lath

Samudragupta's *praśasti* calls him a great musician. He is described as surpassing Nārada and Tumburu in musical skill.[1] The vīṇā type coins minted by Samudragupta show him as playing the vīṇā. They are proof that the *praśasti*—allowing for the usual poetic exaggeration—was not voicing an empty praise. The coins also reveal that Samudragupta took great pride in his musicianship, for no king before him had minted coins of this kind.

But Samudragupta was not the only Gupta king who minted vīṇā type coins. Similar coins minted by his grandson, Kumāragupta I, have also come to light (in the Bayana hoard). Presumably, Kumāragupta I, too, was a vīṇā-playing musician. But no *praśasti* extolling Kumāragupta's musicianship has been uncovered so far. It might be argued that Kumāragupta I was merely emulating this illustrious grandfather in minting a coin-type initiated by him, without having any active personal interest in vīṇā-playing. There are, however, strong grounds which suggest that Kumāragupta I too was, in all likelihood, a musician.

Skill in music was not a rare thing among ancient Indian kings. Kṛshṇa and Arjuna, the royally-born heroes of the *Mahābhārata*, were renowned for their skill in music. The *Harivaṁśa* ascribes to Kṛshṇa the authorship of a new kind of music, the chālikya-gāndharva.[2] Coming to a 'historical' period we hear of Udayana's excellence on the vīṇā. So famous was this 6th century B.C. king of Kauśāmbī for his vīṇā that legends have preserved the name of his instrument also. His vīṇā, called the *ghoṣavatī*, evidently played a central role in Udayana's chief exploit, the wooing and winning of Vāsavadattā, daughter of Pradyota, king of Mālava. Many stories of the magical powers of this vīṇā were current in ancient times. The *ghoṣavatī*, it was said, could subdue the wildest and the most violent of raging elephants with ease.

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[1] *niśitavidagdhamatigāndharvalalitairvrīḍitatridaśapatigurutumburunāradādeḥ*...
—Fleet, *Gupta Inscriptions* No.1, p.8.

[2] *Harivaṁśa*, 89, 66-83 (Citraśālā press edition).

King Khāravela, who ruled over Kaliṅga in the second century B.C., was another king who prided in his proficiency in music. Hāthigumphā inscription speaks of his skill in the art.[3] Another ruler, Mahākṣatrapa Rudradāman in the Junagadh inscription of 2nd century A.D. speaks of his mastery over music.[4] Early Buddhist literature speaks of many kings and princes who were expert in music.[5] Kālidāsa in his *Raghuvaṁśa* says that the royal laps of Agnivarṇa were graced equally by his sweet-spoken queen and his sweet-voiced vīṇā.[6]

Evidently it was not uncommon for kings to be musicians. Many ancient authorities speaking of the education of kings had, indeed, prescribed music as part of a princes' curriculum. Bhīṣma, lecturing Yudhiṣṭhira on statecraft (*rājadharma*) in the Anuśāsanaparvan of the *Mahābhārata* advises him that he should as a king acquire a knowledge of music along with other skills and arts necessary for a good ruler.[7] *Rāmāyaṇa* also includes music among the branches of learning that a prince was required to be versed in.[8] The Hāthigumphā inscription of Khāravela informs us that the king had learnt music along with military arts as a prince.[9] The practice of teaching music to princes doubtlessly continued during Gupta times and after. It certainly was in vogue during Harṣa's period. Bāṇa in his *Kādambarī* speaks of princes being trained in music.[10]

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[3] *'tatiya puna vase gaṁdhavvavedabudho dapanaṭagītavāditasandaṁsanāhi usavasamājakārāpanāhi kiḍāpayati nagarī'. Epigraphia Indica*, Vol.20, p.79.

[4] *'gāndharvanyāyādyānaṁ vidyānāṁ mahatīnāṁ pāraṇadhāraṇavijñāna-prayogāvaptavipulakīrtinā...mahākṣatrapeṇa Rudradāmnā. Ibid.*, Vol.8, p.44.

[5] *Mahāvagga*, 10.2 (p.376 of the Pali Publication Board edition brought out by the Bihar Government). See the story of Prince Dighavu. Also *Kusa Jātaka* (No.531). *Mahāumagga Jātaka* (No.546) etc. Buddha himself was taught music (*Lalitavistara*, Ch.12, p.108 of the Mithila Vidyapitha edition). The story of Kunāla, who sang below the balcony of king Aśoka, is also noteworthy.

[6] *aṅkamaṅkaparivartanocite tasya ninyaturaśūnyatāmubhe/vallakī ca hṛdayaṅgamā-svanā valguvāgapi ca vāmalocana. Raghuvaṁśa*, XIX. 13.

[7] *Mahābhārata*, Anuśāsanaparvan, 104. 46-50.

[8] Kane, P.V., *History of Dharmaśāstra*, Vol.III, p.49. Rāma and his brothers, says Kane, are described as proficient in Vedas, Vedāṅgas, Rājavidyā, Dhanurveda and also Gāndharvaveda. (*Rāmāyaṇa* 1, 18, 24, 26; 2, 1, 20; 2, 2, 34-35; 5, 35, 13-14).

[9] *Ibid. loc.cit.* Khāravela states that he learnt *Gāndharvaveda* along with *lekha, rūpa* (currency) *gaṇanā* (accountancy) and administration of justice when he was a crown-prince. (*Epigraphica Indica*, Vol.20, p.79).

[10] Candrāpīḍa was trained, among other things, in '*vīṇāveṇumurajakāṁsyatāla darduraputaprabhṛtiṣu vādyeṣu*' and '*nāradīyaprabhṛtiṣu gāndharvavedaviśeṣeṣu*'. *Kādambarī*, p.168 (Nirnayasagara edition).

The vast Jain literature of popular tales records many stories of princesses who held *svayaṁvaras* in which the condition for winning the hand of the princess was to excel her in playing the vīṇā. An early example of such a story is to be found in the, significantly named, Vīṇālambhaka of the *Vasudeva Hiṇḍī,* a work noticed before the seventh century A.D. and perhaps composed during the Gupta age or immediately after. In later Jain tales the *vīṇā-svayaṁvara* became an established and oft-repeated motif; it occurs in the works of Hariṣeṇa (9th century A.D.), Vādībha (11th century A.D.), Haricandra (13 century A.D.) and others. Stories of princesses being won in *vīṇā-svayaṁvaras* may belong to the realm of imagination, but they are nonetheless symptomatic of the fact that vīṇā-playing was a well-respected art cultivated even by royalty.

It would not, then, have been out of the ordinary for Kumāragupta I to have been a musician like his grandfather Samudragupta.

The Udayana legend records another intriguing fact. It was believed that the vīṇā *ghoṣavatī* as well as the skill in playing on it was handed down from father to son in the Kauśāmbī royal family to which Udayana belonged. In Bhāsa's *Pratijñāyaugandharāyaṇam,* a play, the script of which in the main, may perhaps go back to the third century B.C., Pradyota, king of Avanti, speaks of Udayana's supreme haughtiness of character. One of the principal reasons he gives is "*darpayati cainaṁ dāyādyakramagataḥ gāndharvo vedaḥ*" (his skill in music which he has received as part of his inheritance makes him insolent).[11]

Another important play on the Udayana-Vāsavadattā theme is the *Vīṇāvāsavadattam.* It has been ascribed by some scholars to Śūdraka. This may well be doubted; but though the problem of its authorship cannot be satisfactorily resolved, the tone, structure and ethos of the play are reminiscent of the Bhāsa dramas (it too, was, moreover, recovered in Kerala) and it bears the mark of being a fairly old production.[12] Udayana's vīṇā figures prominently in the play—as the name *Vīṇāvāsavadattam* implies. The vīṇā has been described as '*Vatsarājakulasarsvaṁ vīṇāratnam*' ('jewel of a vīṇā, the ultimate treasure of the Vatsa kings').[13] This allusion lends weight to the story as recorded in Bhāsa's play.

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[11] *Pratijñāyaugandharāyaṇam,* Act. II.

[12] *Vīṇāvāsavadattam.* See Introduction by K.V. Sarma and Preface by V. Raghavan to the Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute edition of the play.

[13] *Op.cit.,* Act IV (p.69): (*praviṣya vīṇāhastaḥ kañcukīyaḥ*): "*jayatu mahārājaḥ idaṁ khalu śālaṅkāyanena preṣṭam vatsarājākulasarvasvaṁ vīṇāratnam*".

In the Udayana story we have the example of a royal family which treasured musical skill as a family heritage. May this not have been true of the Gupta royal family too? It would be too much to expect that music was literally handed down from father to son, but there is certainly nothing fantastic in thinking that the father was an example to the son and had him learn music and eventually cherish it. No positive proofs can, of course, be adduced. But we do have the fact that grandfather and grandson both played the vīṇā and cared enough about music to mint coins showing them as vīṇā players. Moreover, given the fact that skill in music was cherished in many royal households throughout the ancient period—and the telling evidence of the Vatsa kings of Kauśāmbī—it becomes certainly within the realm of reasonable probability that the Gupta household, too, perhaps treasured music as a family skill.

There is, however, one obvious lacuna in our suggestion: there is no evidence that Chandragupta II was also a musician. Though Chandragupta II issued more coin-types than his father Samudragupta, no coin of his showing him as playing the vīṇā has yet come to light. But before giving up our theory, let us pause and reflect a little more on the available evidence and the absence of it. Firstly, we must not lose sight of the truth that recovery of material evidence—such as coins—from the ancient period has a great element of chance or accidentality. The fact that no vīṇā-type coins of Chandragupta II have been recovered does not necessarily mean that no such coins were minted. Prior to the finding of the Bayana hoard, vīṇā-type coins of Kumāragupta I were also unknown.

Again, the vīṇā coin-type was not issued as the major gold coin by any of the emperors. And the ratio of available vīṇā-type coins being noticeably small in comparison with the total body of discovered coinage, suggests that the actual issue, too, was numerically small. Coins of the vīṇā-type show Samudragupta at leisure and were perhaps issued as a graceful gesture accompanying the achievement of empire, prosperity and well-being. Significantly, the ratio of coins showing Chandragupta II as indulging in gracious living is also very small. Of some types only three or four specimens are known. And one coin type, the so-called king-and-queen-on-couch type where the king is shown drinking wine—a coin which has formed the basis of much speculation regarding the character and personal traits of Chandragupta II—is known through only a single specimen. This being so the fact that no vīṇā-type coin of Chandragupta II is known, can be reasonably said to be due to the vagaries of discovery.[14]

Secondly, it has been suggested by Altekar that the letters construed as 'rūpākṛtī' on one of the couch type coins of Chandragupta II actually form the word rūpakṛtī and mean 'a creator of dramas'. Thus Chandragupta II was perhaps a playwright.[15] If this be true, it would then not be surprising if Chandragupta II also took an active interest in music; for drama as Kālidāsa says is a performance-oriented art[16] and music in ancient times was an inherent part of drama.[17] Besides, the image of Chandragupta II as suggested by some of his coins is that of a person with epicurean tastes. This coupled with his interest in literature—of which he is also believed to have been a great-patron—recalls the portrait of a well-cultivated, sophisticated nāgaraka as painted by Vātsyāyana in his *Kāmasūtra*. The vīṇā always adorned the room of such nāgarakas.[18]

There is thus a distinct possibility that Chandragupta II, too, like his illustrious predecessor issued a vīṇā type coin and it would be premature to conclude that no such coin was ever minted on the strength of the fact that no such coin has been so far recovered.

After Kumāragupta I, Skandagupta was too busy in saving an endangered empire. We expect that he was also taught music as a family tradition or saṁskāra, but he could not or did not keep up the flourishes of his predecessors in minting coins about this or other leisurely occupations. Only three coin types of his have come to light.

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[14] However, a gold coin has been found which, as described in the *Progress Report of the Archaeological Survey of India*, Western Circle, 1916-17 may be an example of a vīṇā-type coin issued by Chandragupta II. But the identification remains uncertain as no photograph of the coin has been published. The legend on it, as well as its reported description—which itself leaves rooms for doubt—cannot be verified. Its description is as follows:

Obverse: King seated on a high-backed couch, with one foot hanging; wearing waist cloth; hand to left touching lyre or feeding some animal; legend-*paramabhāgavata mahā*...

Reverse: Figure of Lakṣmī seated on a footstool with a seat over it; holds uncertain object in hand; to left crescent; legend-*Vikramāditya*(*ḥ*).

As evinced from this description the coin certainly bears resemblances with the vīṇā type, especially, with those issued by Kumāragupta I, where the figure of Lakṣmī (?) is shown as seated on a footstool. See also in this connection fn.2, p.35 'A Lyrist Type Copper Coin' by Bratindranath Mukherjee in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, Vol. I, No.I, 1959.

[15] *The Coinage of the Gupta Empire*, pp.133-34.

[16] *Parivrājikā: deva, prayogapradhānaṁ hi nāṭyaśāstraṁ. Kimatra vāgvyavahāreṇa. Mālavikāgnimitram*, Act I.

[17] *Nāṭyaśāstra* (Gaekwad edition) Vol.IV, 28. 7 and *ṭikā*; also 32, 425 and 436.

[18] *Kāmasūtra*, 1. 4, 4. The sūtra describing the room of a nāgaraka contains the item *nāgadantāvasaktā viṇā*. See also sūtra 1. 3. 15 where vīṇā playing is included among the fine arts to be learnt by the cultivated person.

II

The kings on Gupta coinage are shown as playing a harp vīṇā.[19] Vīṇās of this type are quite common in early sculptures at Bharhut, Besnagar, Amaravati and the Buddhist caves of Pitalkhora,[20] besides other sites. This vīṇā was shaped like a bow that faced down with a tilt or an angle with one open end protruding upward and the other, lower end, forming a hollow belly which served as the sounding board of the instrument. The vīṇā strings were stretched across the structure like bowstrings. In playing, the sounding belly was usually placed on the lap. Strings were so arrayed in the playing position that the lower a string, the shorter its length. The still surviving south Indian instrument yazh resembles this old vīṇā; most similar in structure to the ancient one, however, is the Burmese harp which seems to have been handed down in an almost unchanged form since ancient times.[21]

In the vīṇā-type coins, the king is shown sitting on a couch with both legs resting on a foot-board and holding the vīṇā on his lap. He is portrayed in profile. The right hand is stretched slightly away from the torso, and is shown striking the strings while the left hand lies stretched across the lap, above the hollow belly of the vīṇā. The left hand lies at ease and the palm forms a mudrā-like gesture to which we will have occasion to return. The thumb and forefingers are, in some coins, projecting slightly outwards while in others they are bent towards each other in more than a semi-circle. The open palm faces upward with a slight tilt towards the torso. The remaining three fingers are bent palmwards.[22]

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[19] "The lute of Samudragupta's coins has a long hollow belly covered with a board of seven strings", *The Gupta Gold Coins in the Bayana Hoard,* Altekar, Introduction, p. lxviii. The instrument is actually of the harp type, one of the most ancient musical instruments, common to all old cultures. The strings are tied across a triangular frame; each string, producing a single musical note. The use of the word 'lute' by Altekar here is unhappy.

[20] *The Coinage of the Gupta Empire*, p.74. 'Saptatantri Veena in the Sculptures of Buddhist Caves of Pitalkhora', Swami Prajnanand in *Roopa-Lekha*, Vol.XXXII No.1, July 1961.

[21] For an illustration and description of the Burmese harp see '*Die Musikinstrumentre Indiens Und Indonesiens*', Curt Sachs, pp.140-41.

[22] The kings' posture is almost identical on all vīṇā-type coins, though the impression is not always clear. For a fairly clear impression see the reproduction given by Altekar in *The Coinage of the Gupta Empire*, plate III, No.16. In this coin thumb and fore-finger are projecting slightly outward. In a coin of Kumāragupta I, thumb and fore-finger are clearly seen to be inclined towards each other so as to make a circle-like form; see Altekar, *The Gupta Gold Coins in the Bayana Hoard*. plate XXXI No.5

Scholar have talked of the Gupta kings as vīṇā players only. But some important considerations have led us to think that the kings are shown as singing and that vīṇā-playing is, in the coin-portrayal, an auxiliary activity. This might appear a little startling, for the vīṇā is evident in the picture while singing is not; the kings are shown as actually playing it, while there are no signs to indicate that they were singing. However, let us place our considerations and reasoning before scholars and then perhaps our suggestion will not appear as merely bizarre or eccentric. Let us, to begin with, consider some common portrayals of modern Indian classical singers. Numerous sketches, paintings or photographs of singers show them sitting with a big tānpūrā; their right hand on the strings of the instrument and the left lying idle on the hollowed-out gourd which acts as the sounding belly. In such portraits, the tānpūrā looms literally large; even appearing sometimes to overshadow the singer in size and prominence. Yet, we know that the musician portrayed is a singer, not an instrumental player and that the purpose of the instrument is to act as an accompaniment to the vocal melody.

The vīṇā of Samudragupta and Kumāragupta I, we believe, was also acting as a singer's accompaniment. Let us outline our reasons.

Musical instruments of the string group, especially of the harp type, were commonly used in ancient times to accompany song, which was the dominant form.[23] It was common in ancient India for singers to accompany themselves on the vīṇā. Many references can be cited from literature.

Udayana's legendary vīṇā is well-known to scholars and students of history; what is less known is that legends also speak of Udayana's singing. In the play *Vīṇāvāsavadattam* the vīṇā *ghoṣavatī*, whenever used, is used as accompaniment to song. The first instance of its use is in the episode where Udayana sets out to catch a wild elephant. The dramatist portrays Udayana as approaching the raging beast with his vīṇā which had powers to cast a spell on the wildest of animals.[24] When he comes near the beast, he sings a spell, accompanying himself on his *vīṇā ghoṣavatī*.[25] Later in the play, in Act VIII, Udayana goes to Vāsavadattā's apartments to give her lessons on the vīṇā. During the first lesson Vāsavadattā feels too shy to make music. Sāṅkṛtyāyanī, the elderly female monk who is Vāsavadattā's companion, then requests the king: *'prakṛtyaiva sāpatrapā khalviyaṁ, sandarśanaṁ ca prathamam, tasmādasaktā devī gātuṁ tantrīsparśanādeva vidyārambhaḥ kṛto bhaviṣyati'* ('The lady is bashful by nature. And as she is meeting you for the first time, she cannot bring herself to sing. Let her be initiated into the art by merely touching the strings'). It is clear from this little speech that learning the vīṇā implied learning to sing. Indeed, following Vāsavadattā's inability to sing, Sāṅkṛtyāyanī asks the king to give them an auspicious song as an appropriate beginning to the lesson. The king complies with a hymn to Viṣṇu accompanying himself on the vīṇā.[26] His hearers are enthralled and he sings two more songs, one a *praśasti*, the other a love-song. Vāsavadattā's lessons continue and her love for Udayana grows with her knowledge of the vīṇā. In Act VIII, we find that she has become an expert musician. She is requested by her companions to set to music two love-poems which Udayana had sent her. She sings the poems, accompanying herself on the vīṇā. Sāṅkṛtyāyanī praises her music exclaiming that the vīṇā playing was wonderfully synchronised with the song.

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[23] A famous remark of Śāṁgadeva runs thus: '*nṛttaṁ vādyānugaṁ proktaṁ vādyaṁ gītānuvarti ca*, (*Saṅgīta Ratnākara*, I. 24). Vocal music has traditionally been the major form in India. Ancient musical genres or types were distinguished on the basis of song. Sāma, a basically sung form, gave rise to the jāti, predominantly a vocal genre. In fact gāndharva—the ancient word for music—has been defined in the *Nāṭyśāstra* and *Dattilam* as containing three elements: *svara* (tones) *tāla* (rhythm) and *pada* (words). Clearly the ancients in thinking of music thought primarily of songs. In Greece lyric singers used to accompany their songs on the lyre—the songs were, for this reason called lyrics.

The practice among singers to accompany themsevles on the vīṇā, goes back to a still remoter antiquity. The Sūtra works speak of vīṇāgāthins, a class of Brāhmaṇa or Kṣatriya singers[27], who, as the name suggests, accompanied themselves on the vīṇā. These singers were employed to sing gāthās during sacrificial ceremonies.

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[24] Incidentally, in the *Vidhura Paṇḍita Jātaka* (No.546) we hear of a hatthi-kānta-vīṇā (hasti-kānta-vīṇā). This vīṇā had powers to tame elephants. It may have been used by elephant catchers in ancient times and, perhaps, the stories of ghoṣavatī's power over elephants may have originated out of tales told among elephant-catching circles of the power of the hatthi-kānta-vīṇā.

[25] *Vīṇāvāsavadattam*, Act II, *op.cit.*, p.27.

[26] *Vīṇāvāsavadattam*, Act VII, pp.114-15.

[27] *tantrīsvarāṇi akṣarāṇi ca anyonyaṁ anupraviṣṭānīva. Ibid.*, Act VIII (p.137).

Udayana's vīṇā-playing was associated with singing even in some later versions of the Udayana-Vāsavadattā romance. In Somadeva's *Kathāsaritsāgara* Udayana has been portrayed as singing while playing the vīṇā when approaching the false elephant. He has been described as:

ekākī vādayan vīṇāṁ cintayan bandhanāni saḥ/
madhuradhvani gāyaṁśca śanairupajagāma tam. Kathāsaritsāgara, 2. 4. 17.

Later in the story, as Vāsavadattā's tutor, he is pictured in a charming verse as:

aṅke ghoṣavatī tasya kaṇṭhe gītaśrutistathā/
puro vāsavadattā ca tasthau cetovinodinī//

Singing of epic-ballads was another ancient art. *Rāmāyaṇa*, traditionally considered the *ādikāvya*—the first 'composed' poem as opposed to the 'revealed' body of Vedic mantras—was associated with singing right from the inception of its first śloka by Vālmīki. The sage, as soon as he had uttered the celebrated *śloka* cursing the niṣāda, put to music and sang it in accompaniment to a string instrument.[28] Later Lava and Kuśa sang the *Rāmāyaṇa* in the court of Rāma in the presence of a distinguished gathering, which included experts in music. Again there was string accompaniment to their singing.[29]

In the *Dīghanikāya* there occurs the story of Pañcaśikha who sings some gāthās to the Buddha. He plays the vīṇā to his own singing and so excellent is the total effect that Buddha commends him saying that his song and his vīṇā were in beautiful harmony with each other.[30] The *Mahāvagga* contains the story of prince Dīghavu, son of Dīghiti, king of Kosala, fallen on bad days, who sang a sorrowful song to his own vīṇā-accompaniment, in the elephant-stables of Brahmadatta, king of Kāśī.[31]

Ibid. 2. 4. 32. It is quite likely that the description of Udayana as both singing and playing the vīṇā was part of the original tale as told by Guṇāḍhya; for significantly enough, we find that Kṣemendra in his *Bṛhatkathāmañjarī* also pictures the king with words like:

> *Kūṭakuñjaramālokya vīṇāmadhuragītibhiḥ*. *Bṛhatkathāmañjarī* 2. 2. 39. And again: *vīṇāgeyakalājñāne śiṣyeyaṁ bhavatāmiti*. *Ibid*., 2. 2. 47.

[28] The *Hiraṇya Śrauta Sūtra* speaks of '*brāhmaṇau vīṇāgāthinau gāyataḥ*' (14. 2. 6) and again '*rājanyau vīṇāgāthinau gāyataḥ*' (14. 2. 17. 18). Also *Āpastamba Gṛhya Sūtra*: *gāyatamiti vīṇāgāthinau śaṁsasti*' (14. 6. 4).

Sohoni in his paper entitled 'Vīṇā coin-type of Samudragupta and Kumāragupta I' (*Journal of the Numismatic Society of India*, Vol.XIX) puts forward the suggestion that Samudragupta issued the vīṇā-type coins after performing the aśvamedha sacrifice which, too, was celebrated through the issue of appropriate coins, and that he might have played the vīṇā in this sacrifice as the ritual demands. Perhaps he did, and perhaps he acted as a vīṇāgāthin, in which case he would also have rendered songs.

[29] *padabaddho 'sarasmaḥ tantrīlayasamanvitaḥ śokārtasya pravṛtto me śloko bhavatu nānyathā*. *Rāmāyaṇa*, 1. 2. 18 (Gita Press edition)

[30] '*bhagavā pañcaśikhaṁ gandhabhadevaputtam etadavoca-'saṁuandanti kho te, pañcaśikha, tantisaro gītassareṇa gītassaro ca tantīssareṇa; na ca paṇa, pañcaśikha, tantīssaro gītassaraṁ ativattati, gītassaro ca tantīssaram*'. *Dīghanikāya*, *Mahāvagga*, *sakkapanhasuttam*. (pp.199-200, Pt.II of the Pali Publication Board edition brought out by the Bihar Government).

[31] '*atha kho bhikkhave, Dīghavu kumāra rattiya paccusasamayaṁ paccuṭṭhāya hattiśālāyāṁ mañjunā sareṇa gāyi, vīṇāṁ ca vādesī*'. *Mahāvagga* 10, 2 (p.376 of the Pali Publication Board edition).

In the *Jātakas* there are quite a few instances of singers accompanying their song on the vīṇā. The love-lorn king Kuśa, whose story is told in the *Kuśa Jātaka* (No.531), plays the vīṇā and sings songs of love to attract his estranged queen. The *Cullapralobhana Jātaka* (No.263) speaks of a danseuse who sang with the vīṇā in order to arouse passion in the heart of the prince of Vārāṇasī. So skillfully balanced was her music-making that vīṇā playing and singing appeared as one single melody.[32] The *Kakati Jātaka* (No.327) has a musician (*gandharva*) who sang *gāthās* to his own vīṇā accompaniment.

The *Laṅkāvatara sūtra* (composed sometime during the first two or three centuries of the Christian era) gives a very graphic description of Rāvaṇa, the rākṣasa king, who with his retinue attended upon Buddha and sang panegyrics to his glory. He accompanied his song on the vīṇā, tuning the strings to the appropriate notes. His song merged effortlessly with the melody produced on the vīṇā.[33]

Kālidāsa in the Uttaramegha of his *Meghadūta* portrays the forlorn yakṣiṇī in a series of poignant word-pictures. One moving *mandākrāntā* verse delineates the yakṣiṇī with vīṇā on her lap, wanting to while away her sorrow in singing songs marked with the name of her lover; but her falling tears wet the strings of her instrument, making it difficult for her to tune it.[34] Cārudatta, the hero of Śūdraka's *Mṛcchakaṭika*, praising the singing of his friend Rebhila says that the singing was closely synchronised with string-playing[35] referring evidently to vīṇā accompaniment. In another play, also by Śūdraka, a bhāṇa called *Padmaprabhṛtaka*,[36] vīṇā-playing with song is clearly alluded to: the haetara Śoṇadāsī is pictured in a sad mood singing softly and playing the vīṇā which rests on her lap.[37]

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[32] *'-tantīssareṇa gītassaraṁ gītassarena tantīssaraṁ ca'* quoted in *Prācina Bhārata meṅ Saṅgīta*, p.26, fn.2. The words are reminiscent of the Buddha's commendation of Pañcaśikha's playing quoted above.

[33] *'atha rāvaṇo rākṣasādhipatiḥ saparivāraḥ pauṣpakaṁ vimānamadhiruhya yena bhagavānstenopajagāma, upetya vimānādavatīrya saparivāro bhagavantaṁstrikṛtvaḥ pradakṣaṇikṛtya tūryatālavacaraiḥ pravādayadbhirindranīlamayena daṇḍeṅa vaidūryamursāra pratyuptāṁ viṇāṁ priyaṁgupāṇḍunārdhyeṇa vastreṇa pārśvalambitāṁ kṛtvā, saharṣya, ṛṣabha, gāndhāra, dhaivata, niṣāde, madhyama, kaiśika, gītasavaregrāmamūrchanādiyuktenānusāryaṁ salīlaṁ viṇāmanupraviśya gāthābhirgītairanugāyati sma'. Laṅkāvatara Sūtra.*

[34] *Meghadūta*, Uttaramegha, 23 (Nirnaya Sagara edition).

[35] *'taṁ tasya svarasaṅkramaṁ mṛdugiraḥ śliṣṭaṁ ca tantrīsvanam'. Mṛchchakaṭika*, Act III, verse 5.

[36] The attribution is, in this case, less certain.

Another old bhāṇa, *Pādatāḍitakam*, by Śyāmilaka, who is believed by some scholars to have composed it during the reign of Chandragupta I,[38] also has a similar picture: a restless (*utkaṇṭhitā*) haetara, awaiting her lover, expresses her feelings in a sweet song, accompanying herself on the *sapta-tantrī* vīṇā.[39] Another bhāṇa, attributed to Vararuci, called *Ubhayābhisārikā*, pictures a man tormented by love singing songs in the *vaktra* and *aparavaktra* metres while playing the vīṇā, tuned appropriately to his song.[40] Dr. Motichandra, on inernal evidence, assigns this play to the reign of Kumāragupta.[41]

There is the well-known scene in Bāṇa's *Kādambarī* where Candrāpīḍa first meets Mahāśvetā. He is attracted to her by her out-of-the-world music: she had been singing to her own vīṇā-playing in a lonely Śiva temple.[42] In Jain stories of *vīṇā-svayaṁvara*, though ostensibly the competition seems to involve vīṇā-playing alone, yet singing was taken for granted as associated with the vīṇā. In *Vasudeva Hiṇḍī*, Vasudeva sings the *viṣṇu-gītaka* with the vīṇā in the competition which won him a bride.[43] Later works make a similar association of vīṇā with song in the bridal competition.[44]

Many more instances, can be quoted, but these, we hope, will suffice to indicate a close association between song and vīṇā. We do not mean to suggest that the vīṇā was always associated with song. Our intention is only to bring out the fact that such an association was common. In the instance of the Gupta kings such an association is strongly indicated by another circumstance. The vīṇā type coins, as the experts have remarked, picture an instrument with seven strings.[45] The *saptatantrī*-vīṇā or the seven-stringed harp was, indeed, a popular ancient instrument. It is mentioned in the *Jātakas*. One entire *Jātaka* story centres round the *saptatantrī* (*Guttila Jātaka*, No. 243). The *Vimānavatthu* speaks of the sweet-sounding *saptatantrī* (*sattatantīṁ sumadhurāṁ*).[46] Śyāmilaka in his *Pādatāḍitakam*, describing a haetara singing (see above) speaks of her as playing the *saptatantrī*.[47] Altekar, in calling Samudragupta's vīṇā a *saptatantrī*, has pointed out that representation of this instrument abounds in the sculpture of Bharhut, Besnagar and Amaravati.[48] Swami Prajnananda's *A Historical Study of Indian Music* cites illustrations of the *saptatantrī* vīṇā at the Pitalkhora caves.[49]

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[37] '...*aṅkādhirūḍhāṁ vallakīmīṣatkararuhairava-ghaṭṭayantī kākalīmandamadhureṇa svareṇa kūjayantī tiṣṭhati'*. *Padmaprābhṛtaka*; See p.44 of *Caturbhāṇī*, translated into Hindi and edited by Motichandra, Pub.: Hindi Grantha Ratnakara Karyalaya, Bombay, 1959.

[38] See Introduction to the *Caturbhāṇī*, *op.cit.*, p.7.

[39] '...*asau saptatantrīrnakhairghaṭṭayantī kalaṁ kākalipañcamaprāyamutkaṇṭhitā valgugītāpadeśena vikrośati'*. *Pādatāḍitakam*, *Caturbhāṇī*, *op.cit.*, p.177.

[40] *'aśokavanikābhyāse kopi khalu puruṣaḥ sandaṣṭa iva madanenāvyaktakākalīṁ racanāmūrchanāṁ vīṇāṁ kṛtvā ime vaktrāpavaktre gāyannātikrāntaḥ'* (the two poems follow). *Ubhayābhisārikā*, *Chaturbhāṇī*, *op.cit.*, p.144.

[41] Introduction, p.8, *Chaturbhāṇī*, *op.cit.*

[42] *'anavaratagītaparisphritādharapuṭavaśādatiśucibhiḥ... snapayantīṁ gaurīnāthaṁ ...dakṣiṇakareṇa vīṇāmāsphālayantīṁ, pratyakṣamiva gāndharvavidyāṁ...' Kādambarī*, pūrvabhāga, pp.281-83 (Nirṇaya Sagara Press ed.).

[43] *Vasudeva Hiṇḍī*, Vīṇā-lambhaka, Pub. Jain Atmanand Sabha, Bhavnagar.

[44] e.g. *Bṛhatkathākośa* of Hariṣeṇa (c.10th century A.D.), see the story of Gandharvadattā (114,6). Also *Gadyacintāmaṇi* of Vādibha Siṁha Sūri, Lamba 3. The work is assigned to the 9th century by Panna Lal Jain; see Introduction, pp.15-16, to the Bharatiya Jnanapitha edition; K.K. Handigui assigns it to the 11th century. See his Foreword to the *Jīvandhara Campū*, Bharatiya Jnanapitha edition). Both Jivandhara and the princess he competed with, sang hymns to the Jina on the vīṇā, pp.175-79, Bharatiya Jnanapitha edition. See also the same episode in *Jīvandhara Campū* (c. 13th century) Lamba 3, verses 31-32, p.64 of the Bharatiya Jnanapitha edition.

Another point suggests the *saptatantrī*. Harp-vīṇā in ancient times was played both with a plectrum (*koṇa*) and the fingers. The Gupta kings on their vīṇā coins are shown as playing the instrument with their fingers, for the gesture of the right palm does not appear to indicate that the king was holding a plectrum. This, along with other circumstances, also points to a seven-stringed instrument; for Bharata in distinguishing between different vīṇās and their number of strings, remarks that citrā, the vīṇā with seven strings was played with the fingers.[50] Śyāmilaka's haetara, who plays a *saptatantrī* vīṇā, does so with her nails (*nakhairghaṭṭayantī*).

Now if it be true that the Gutpa kings are shown playing a seven-stringed harp, then certain implications follow which are meaningful in the present context. A seven-stringed harp can logically be tuned to only seven notes. It can produce only one octave with the seven regular notes of the ancient scale, unless one or more note be dropped; in which case, too, the range will not significantly increase. Dropping of too many notes in order to achieve a greater range of pitch would produce so much tonal gap between notes as to make the resulting melody musically poor or threadbare. In truth, only a single octave can be effectively achieved with seven strings on a harp. But effective music cannot be made if one has only the range of a single octave at one's command. Ancient music recognised a range of three octaves, known as the *mandra, madhya* and *tāra*. This was the range theoretically envisaged on the basis of the fact that the gifted voice when rightly trained can attain a range of three octaves.[51] Of the harp vīṇās, *the mattakokilā,* which had twenty-one strings was the most appropriate vīṇā for giving an instrumental rendering of melodies in their optimum form .[52] It could do justice to the most ambitiously wide-ranging melody then current. But the *mattakokilā* was evidently a later innovation. It is conspicuously absent in the *Nāṭyaśāstra.* It is also noticeably missing from the work of the early poets who name other vīṇās. Obviously, even though it may have been known in the Gupta age or perhaps earlier, it was not a dominant instrument. Abhinava is the first writer on music who speaks of the *mattakokilā* with twenty-one strings as the chief of the vīṇās. He cites in this connection a passage from an unnamed earlier authority. In this passage, the *mattakokilā* is listed along with a number of other vīṇās, but its dominance is neither stated nor implied. The number of its strings is also not mentioned.[53] The *Amarakośa* names three vīṇās: *vallakī, vipañcī* and *parivādinī*—these are names quite familiar from ancient kāvya literature. The *vipañcī,* according to Bharata, had nine strings; the *parivādinī,* says Amara, had seven;[54] the *vallakī,* too, was certainly not a many-stringed vīṇā. The fact that Amara does not mention the *mattakokilā* is certainly an added evidence for its lateness. There is another significant testimony: *Rajapraśnīyam,* the Jain canonical text, which perhaps belongs to the Gupta age, lists a large variety of vīṇās, but the *mattakokilā* is not named.[55]

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[45] *The Coinage of the Gupta Empire*, Altekar, p.74.

[46] *Vimānavatthu*, 32, 2, 5, 1.

[47] See n.25 above.

[48] *Op.cit., loc.cit.*

[49] The book is published by Anandadhara Prakashan, Calcutta. See Chapter 6 of the work and illustrations.

[50] *Saptatantrī bhaveccitrā vipañci tu bhavennave/ koṇavādyā vipañcī syaccitrā cāṅgulivādanā*. *Nāṭyaśāstra* (Gaekwad Oriental Series Edition), Vol.IV, 29, 118.

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[51] This is normal; some rare voices can attain more and ati-tāra and ati-mandra were not unknown to ancient theoreticians, too. Only the range of folk-melodies is often restricted to less than an octave, but the Gupta king, in an age when art-music had reached great sophisticated heights, was certainly not playing folk-music. Moreover, in folk forms song is supreme; instrumental playing of folk-melodies makes little musical sense. The intimte connection between the human voice and the range in octaves of melodies in ancient times is apparent in the ancient notion of 'sthāna'. Sthāna was the generic term for the octaves. At the same time, the term also denoted the anatomic seat within the human body from which in singing, the octaves were believed to be produced. Thus the sthāna for the mandra octave was the chest, for the madhya octave the neck region and for the tāra octave the head. A note in the mandra octave was often referred to as a chest note; a note in the madhya octave could be called a kaṇṭha-note or a note of the neck; tāra notes were head-notes.

[52] *tatra mattakokilā pradhānabhūtā. ekaviṁśatitantrīkatvenānyūnā dhikam tristhānagatasvarasāraṇājātigiti vīṇāśarīramucyate. tadgataśca dhātuprayoga uktaḥ. tadupajīvakatvenāparā bhavantīti.* Abhinava on *Nāṭyaśāstra* 29, 112. (See Gaekwad edition, Vol.IV).

[53] *Ibid.*; see verses quoted in commentary on *Nāṭyaśāstra* 29, 112.

[54] *Vīṇā tu vallakī sā tu tantrībhiḥ saptabhiḥ parivādinī. Amarakośa* 1, 7, 3.

Significant music can be made even with a range of two octaves, which is all that many of our best singers command and doubtless this was true of ancient musicians also. But this is a limitation that the voice has perforce to submit to. An instrumentalist, with a mechanism that can readily be made to cover a wide range at his service, need not do so. To deliberately restrict oneself to just one octave can have no justification, unless the instrument being played was not the chief tool for rendering the melody. This, we suggest, is what was obtained in the case of Samudragupta and Kumāragupta I. They were making vocal music. Musical range and melodic finesse was attained through the voice; the *saptatantrī* vīṇā served mainly as instrumental support; for though the *saptatantrī* could not provide range it could yet give all the necesssary notes in the octave of any desired scale.

It can here be argued that even on the open string of a vīṇā of the harp variety, great musical range can be achieved by playing the string in the manner of the Hawaiian guitar, or the modern *vicitra*-vīṇā or the south Indian *goṭṭuvādyam.* A single string length can produce more than one octave if properly manipulated by an object which can press it and glide over it. However, such a playing needs both hands, one to strike and another to play the string. The Gupta kings are playing the instrument with only one hand, the other lies idle on the sounding belly of the vīṇā.

The gesture and position of this idle hand is also suggestive. Altekar, in his famous work *The Gupta Gold Coins in the Bayana Hoard,* wonders why the left hand is above the sounding board and not below it, where it could have lent proper support to the instrument.[56] One could have expected the musician to be holding tight to the vīṇā had the attention of the musician been primarily directed towards the instrument; had he, in other words, been making instrumental music. But if vocal music was the king's chief concern, he would be merely strumming the vīṇā, merely sounding the principal note or notes around which he happened to be weaving his vocal melody.[57] A hand loosely placed above the sounding board can make the instrument secure enough for his purpose. In fact, many modern singers too, while strumming the tānpūrā with their right hand, place the other loosely on its round belly.

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[55] The work contains a detailed description of a very elaborate ballet-like dramatic pageant which the gandharva Sūryābha presented before Lord Mahāvīra. The following passage lists the vīṇās that were played during the performance: *muccijjantāṇāṁ viṇānāṁ vipañcināṁ vallakināṁ kuṭṭijjantāṇāṁ mahantīṇāṁ kacchapiīnāṁ cittaviṇānāṁ sārijjantāṇāṁ vaddhisānāṁ sughosānāṁ nandighoṣānāṁ phuṭṭijjantīnām bhamarīṇāṁ chabbhamarīṇāṁ parivainīṇāṁ chippantīnāṁ tūṇāṇāṁ tumbaviṇāṇām. Rājapraśnīyam Sūtra* 41.

[56] 'One expects the left hand to be placed under the lute in order to support it'. *The Gupta Gold Coins in the Bayana Hoard*', Altekar, Introduction, p.lxix.

The gesture of the left palm is also noteworthy. It has been suggested that this is the natural gesture of a musician deep in his music. This may be so; and if so such a gesture is more common with singers than players; for players usually have both their hands full. We suggest another posssibility. The gesture forms what was known as the vyākhyāna mudrā—though it has not been looked at this way[58]—except that the arm is not raised towards the chest as is usual in this mudrā. But this is easily explained; a person engaged in vīṇā playing could not have raised his free arm as it acted as a support to the vīṇā.

In ancient iconography, the vyākhyāna mudrā suggests speech, exposition, teaching—in short, uttering of words. The lips are not shown as parted as this would hamper the expression of serenity and composure associated with vyākhyāna. The mudrā itself is symbolic of utterance. The vyākhyāna mudrā found in association with the vīṇā surely symbolized the act of singing, which too involves a kind of utterance.

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[57] This may have been done in ways similar to those employed by modern Hindustani vocalists who use the svaramaṇḍala. The svaramaṇḍala is an old instrument in India, though in its current form it has obviously been influenced by the East European Zither. The svaramaṇḍala has a direct kinship with the older harp-vīṇā, especially the mattakokilā. Kallinātha, commenting on *Saṅgīta Ratnākara* 6, 109-113 says: *mattakokilaiva loke svaramaṇḍalamityucyate*. The svaramaṇḍala never lost its popularity. Abul Fazl lists it among the instruments used during Akbar's reign. Maharaja Sawai Pratap Singh Deva of Jaipur, testifies to the use of the instrument during the end of the eighteenth century in his *Saṅgīta-Sāra* (Hindi). See Part II, pp.7-8 of the Poona Gyan Samaj edition, Poona, 1910.

It is indeed a notable fact that the closest modern parallels of the ancient kings' vīṇā-playing portraits are the familiar photographs or paintings of such singers as Bade Ghulam Ali Khan singing with their svaramaṇḍalas on their laps.

[58] There was no single fixed gesture for the palm in the vyākhyāna mudrā. But there are a number of loosely related variations. On some vīṇā type coins the left thumb and forefinger are shown as projecting slightly outwards while in others they bend towards each other in more than a semi-circle. In his *The Development of Hindu Inconography* J.N. Banerjea notes that both these positions are found depicted in ancient sculpture, indicating vyākhyāna mudrā; pp.254-55.

The use of this mudrā was a happy stroke on the part of the mint designer. He had so composed the figure as to show the king in profile, thus pushing the vīṇā towards the side and making the figure of the king more prominent. To have shown His Majesty in this posture with his lips parted in song would have resulted in a very uncouth, beak-like, effect.

III

Finally, a few words about music, kingship and a historical generalisation commonly made. Historians often speak of music as the tempting devil who lures a king away from his stern regal duties, into the soft arms of decadence, the result being inevitable decay and loss of power. The example of the Gupta kings, especially that of Samudragupta, makes us stop and think twice before becoming a party to such a generalization. Here were kings who at the height of power and glory took active interest in music, without wallowing in decadence. The fact is that music can be the expression of inner strength, power and glory as well as moral weakness and decadenec, for music is as complex and multifaceted as the human mind which uses it as a medium of expression.

19

The Vākāṭaka Caves at Ajanta and their Successors

Walter M. Spink

The development of the rock-cut caves of Western India falls into two great phases. The first, which attests to the dynamic spread of Buddhism into Western India, ended in the second century A.D. Then, remarkably, excavating activity almost totally ended throughout India until after the middle of the fifth century A.D. The sole excavations which can be assigned to this long hiatus of nearly three hundred years are the very small and single-chambered Hindu caves at Udayagiri in central India, mostly dated to about 400 A.D. Thus it is evident that the excavators who undertook the first caves in the new (so-called Mahāyāna) phase of Buddhist patronage had no experience doing this type of work before. This explains the diffident and often clumsy character of their inaugural efforts, as well as their initial dependence on the earlier (Hīnāyāna) rock-cut forms for determining the general format of their monuments.

By far the most remarkable series of caves created in this renaissance of Buddhist excavating activity in the late fifth century are those cut into the dramatically curved gorge of the Waghora River a few kilometers from the old town of Ajanta, from which the site takes its name. Lying about one hundred kilometers north-northeast of present-day Aurangabad, the site was included within the domains of the emperor Harisheṇa of the Vākāṭaka dynasty. It might well be argued that Indian classical culture reached the very highest point in its development during the reign of this great but long-neglected king, who ruled from c. 460 to c.477 A.D. Of course this cultural florescence had its origins in generations of vigorous growth under the Gupta kings of the fourth and fifth centuries; but by the early years of Harisheṇa's rule the Gupta dynasty was starting its long course of gradual disintegration. The decline was in part due to pressures from the Hephthalite Huns to the north, in part due to internal dissensions, and in part due to the aggressive expansionism of Harisheṇa himself, whose domains in central India stretched from Kaliṅga on the Bay of Bengal to the Konkan coast on the Arabian Sea. As it turned out, it was the Vākāṭaka dynasty, under the emperor Harisheṇa, that became the final great sustainer of India's Golden Age; and when the Vākāṭaka dynasty was shattered, during the reign of Harisheṇa's inept son and successor, by a disastrous insurrection of rebellious feudatories, India entered a period of political chaos from which it did not recover for nearly fifty years.[1] By that time, as we shall see, the first great *Hindu* caves were being created, and stand as witnesses to profound political changes and to a significant cultural renewal.

The urgent yet at the same time sporadic development of Ajanta's Mahāyāna phase dramatically reveals the critical historical situation in late Vākāṭaka times. Indeed, we can follow the course of events by analyzing the progress of the site's patronage during the times, from about 460 on, with which we are here concerned. Furthermore, by analyzing the development of style and iconography in a number of the inscribed caves, it can be shown that at least five of the patrons mentioned therein cooperated in the inauguration of the site early in the 460's, and yet were still involved, and anxiously trying to complete their work, when the site started into its sudden final decline just prior to 480. Assuming that all of these five patrons were relatively mature when they began their impressive undertakings at the time of the site's inauguration, and knowing that *all five* were still alive late in the site's history when the dedicatory inscriptions that refer to them were written, our assertion that the whole Mahāyāna evolution of the site spanned no more than two decades seems particularly credible.[2]

Such "actuarial" evidence perfectly accords with other compelling evidence, which a reconsideration of Daṇḍin's *Daśakumāracharita* brings to light.[3] Since it can be shown that a significant start was not made on any of the Mahāyāna caves at Ajanta prior to the inauguration of Cave 16, which was begun during Harisheṇa's reign by his own chief minister, we know that they all must have been started sometime after 458; for at that date, as we know from the Hisse-Borala inscription, Harisheṇa's father was still reigning. And since all of Ajanta's activity can be shown to fall within the regnal periods of Harisheṇa and his ill-fated successor, Sarvasena III (the last Vākāṭaka king), this activity must have ended well before 486. This is because the Barwani copper plate inscription of Mahārāja Subandhu reveals that the latter king was ruling in Mahishmatī by that date, yet the *Daśakumāracharita* makes it clear that Mahishamatī was within the domains of the Vākāṭakas up until the collapse of their dynasty. All such evidence supports the conclusion, as I have shown elsewhere, that the accession of Harisheṇa, and the final collapse of the Vākāṭaka power after the death of his successor, can reasonably be placed at about 460 and 483 respectively.[4] Within these limits, the site's inauguaration and its final abandonment can be placed at about 462 and 480 respectively. One must, however, allow a year or two leeway in such calculations, since there are no absolute dates given in any of the inscriptions of Harisheṇa's reign.

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[1] See the author's 'The Vākāṭaka's Flowering and Fall', forthcoming in the *Proceedings of the International Seminar on the Art at Ajanta*, edited by R. Parimoo.

[2] See Spink, W., 'Ajanta's Chronology: Politics and Patronage' in *Kalādarśana* AIIS Volume edited by J. Williams, New Delhi, 1981, pp.109-26. Assuming that Harisheṇa sponsored Cave 1, the end of work on which signals the final stage of the site's consistent development, he could be considered yet another donor whose maturity comprehends essentially the whole of the site's Mahāyāna development. Also, although the local king, Upendragupta, is not heard of after c.471, due to his defeat, it is evident that all of his own caves were made within a rather brief period, beginning after Harisheṇa's accession, and ending well before Harisheṇa died.

[3] For a discussion of the evidence in the *Daśakumāracharita* see Spink, W., 'The Great Cave at Elephanta: A Study of Sources,' in *Essays on Gupta Culture*, ed. by B. Smith, Delhi, 1983, pp.235-82.

Thus Ajanta's vigorous and consistent Mahāyāna development, which ended abruptly when Harisheṇa died in c. 477, occupied a span of only about fifteen years. (See Time Chart). Even including the helterskelter production of intrusive Buddha images during Ajanta's last few anxious years, up until c. 480, it is clear that the site had been totally abandoned as far as any further artistic patronage was concerned less than twenty years after work on it had begun.

Admittedly, this "short" chronology is still not accepted by all scholars, some of whom believe that the site's Mahāyāna development occupied two centuries or more, with the Vākāṭakas being responsible for only a few of the caves, such as Cave 16 and 17, both directly assignable to Harisheṇa's reign on inscriptional grounds. They would contend that the more "developed"—generally more elaborate—Ajanta caves, such as Cave 2 and Cave 26, date from the sixth or even seventh century, and support such a late dating by assuming that the great cave at Elephanta, Caves 21 and 29 at Ellora, and certain caves at Aurangabad all belong to the seventh or eighth century, whereas actually these are all sixth century monuments.[5] All of this confusion began some years ago with the mistaken assumption that the so-called "Embassy Scene" (actually an unidentified Jātaka tale) in Ajanta Cave 1 might depict the visit of a Persian ambassador to the court of the (Hindu !) Chālukya king Pulakeśin II, an event that was known to have taken place in 625 A.D.[6] By the time that this clearly incorrect identification had been proven groundless, the notion that the paintings in Cave 1 all belonged to this period about 150 years too late—had gained currency and authority. By then, of course, the even later dating of Elephanta and associated caves at Ellora and Aurangabad had also become "conventional", and was called forth to support the same erroneous dating of Cave 1 and other caves at Ajanta which has at first supported *it*!

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[4] See ref. note 1.

[5] See Spink, W., 'Ellora's Earliest Phase', in *Bulletin of the Ame. Academy of Benares*, Inaugural Issue, pp.11-22, Figs.21-40.

The scholars who object to my so-called "short chronology" for Ajanta's Mahāyāna phase argue that the excavation and decoration of more than two dozen major caves could never have been accomplished in such a short time. In response to this, it could be noted first of all that *not one* of the many Mahāyāna caves was ever fully painted, and in fact considerably more than half of them were still being cut out by the excavators when work on them was abandoned. Thus the question perhaps *should* be—particularly if one recognizes that nearly all of them were started during the first five or six years of activity at the site—how could it have taken so *long* to carve them, if work went on at the site for over a decade and a half? Knowing the speed with which excavators, to say nothing of painters, can work, and being able to judge from the evidence of those caves where work stopped in mid-course that dozens of workers must have been employed on each, it is obvious that many or all of them must have suffered lengthy periods of delay at various points in their progress. (See Time Chart).

The explanation for the burst of energy with which Ajanta's Mahāyāna phase was begun, after nearly three centuries during which no such excavations were done anywhere in India, can be found in its prestigious and affluent patronage, while it must also be true that Harisheṇa's strong control over his growing empire encouraged such major public endeavors. Indeed, the evidence of the Thalner inscription of the third year of Harisheṇa's reign suggests that this region, under a feudatory ruler, had been part of Harisheṇa's inherited realm and therefore was probably strongly held from the start.[7] This fact alone would have encouraged travel and trade and would have made Ajanta an attractive destination for artists, monks, and devotees who would have heard about the new activity there from afar.

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[6] See Schlingloff, D., *Studies in Ajanta Paintings*, Delhi, 1987, pp.58-63.

[7] For Thalner inscription, see ref. note 1.

Ajanta's Mahāyāna phase began in a burst of enthusiasm. As many as ten or twelve caves were begun during the first two or three years of inaugural activity; and what is particularly significant is the type of patronage involved. Judging from the extant inscriptions, these founders were a very powerful group indeed, all connected in one way or another to important courts. The main motive power may have come from the local feudatory king himself—Upendragupta of Ṛshika—whose inscription in Cave 17 explains that after the sudden death of his younger brother, having the "consciousness of transience" vividly in mind, he "made the great tree of religious merit grow".[8] This rich and pious ruler donated an impressive complex of four caves (#17-20) at the very center of the site. His beautiful chaitya hall, Cave 19, carefully oriented to the position of the rising sun at the winter solstice, was certainly planned as the new devotional center for the site.[9] Although its basic shape proves its dependence on Cave 9, one of the two old Hīnayāna chaitya halls at the site, its elaborate facade and interior decoration reflect the lavishly ornate style of the day, with which the architects and artists at the site would have been familiar from previous work on palaces and temples.

Upendragupta also donated a large and beautifully painted vihāra for use as a residence for well over thirty monks who, two to a cell, once occupied the small chambers cut in the side and rear walls around the cave's pillared interior. But now, in the Mahāyāna phase, the vihāra functions as more than a mere residence. Beginning in c. 466, a shrine, with a seated Buddha image, came to be invariably added at the center of the rear wall.

Varāhadeva, chief minister of the Vākāṭaka emperor Harisheṇa, was another prestigious early patron of the site. "Devoted only to the Buddha," he proved his piety by donating the splendid vihāra, Cave 16, "adorned...with beautiful galleries and...affording enjoyment of well-known comforts in all seasons,...to the Community of Monks."[10]

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[8] For the Cave 17 inscriptions see Mirashi, V.V., *Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas*, Ootacamund, 1963, pp.127-29.

[9] See Spink, W., 'Ajanta's Chronology; Solstitial Evidence', *Ars Orientalis*, XV, (1985), pp.97-117.

[10] For the Cave 16 inscription, see ref. note 8, pp.109-11.

Besides that, he also donated a similar cave, the so-called Ghaṭotkacha vihāra, near the village of Gulwada, eleven miles away.

A third powerful patron, the monk Buddhabhadra, aided by the monk Dharmadatta and a "good pupil' named Bhadrabandhu, inaugurated the great cave complex at the western extremity of the site, at this same early date.[11] This complex centers upon a large chaitya hall (Cave 26), to which upper and lower wings were added at either side of its court. The clumsily- conceived upper wings, here called Caves 25 and 27, could well be the first Mahāyāna vihāras begun at the site, having been in course of excavation even before the full facade between them had been exposed.[12] They were abandoned while still very incomplete, however, probably because the lower wings were more "up-to-date" and convenient.

Cave 26's relatively remote location was not selected because of its being begun at a late date, when all more central locations along Ajanta's scarp had already been filled, as was long supposed. Rather, its positioning was determined by the desire to orient the great hall to the rising sun at the summer solstice, just as Cave 19 has been oriented to the sun's position at the winter solstice. The Cave 26 complex's donor, the monk Buddhabhadra, also had impressive courtly connections; in his dedicatory inscription, he claims to have been a friend of the minister of the neighbouring province of Aśmaka "through many successive rebirths".[13]

With so many prestigious patrons involved in the inauguration of Mahāyāna activity at Ajanta, it is hardly surprising to find that the Vākāṭaka emperor eventually himself took an active interest in the site. "That moon among princes, Harisheṇa", as one of the inscriptions at the site describes him, was almost certainly the patron of Cave 1, which was started some five years after Ajanta's renaissance was underway.[14] Appropriately, Cave 1 is the most impressively decorated vihāra at the site. It is probably significant too that all of its narrative paintings and carvings are insistently focussed upon the theme of ideal kingship.

Although Ajanta's development began so auspiciously, it was soon interrupted by what appears to have been an outbreak of hostilities between Upendragupta, the feudatory king of this region (ancient Ṛshika), and the rival king of the neighbouring Aśmaka, who was also a Vākāṭaka feudatory. This had a disastrous effect on work at the site, as is clear from the fact that for a short period (c.469-c.472) work continued *only* on the monuments of the local king (Upendragupta) and on the emperor Harisheṇa's Cave 1. But then, from about 472 to about 475, work at Ajanta was totally interrupted; and the cause seems clear. It would appear that Upendragupta, the king of Ṛshika, although initially secure, was now no longer able to withstand the assaults of the Aśmakas; for after what appears to have been a frenzied finishing-up of the shrine images in his vihāras, Caves 17 and 20, and a hasty concentration on completing the most essential portions of his sumptuous chaitya Cave 19, work on his caves ended completely. It is significant that, judging from the evidencc of style and iconography, the related Buddhist excavations at Bagh, in the more northernly domains of the Vākāṭaka king Harisheṇa, and the caves at Dharaśiva, in his domains to the south, appear to have been begun at this very point in time. Quite possibly, apart from the Vākāṭaka's general interest in supporting Buddhism, the impetus for these new undertakings was the sudden availability of a host of experienced but unemployed artisans from the troubled Ajanta region to take up such work. Then, as the evidence also suggests, at least some of them must have returned to work at Ajanta, as well as at the Ghaṭotkacha vihāra, and at the Aśmaka-connected Caves 1 and 3 at Aurangabad, when peace was restored a few years later.

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[11] For the Cave 26 inscription, see Yazdani, G., *Ajanta*, Vol 4, text (1955), pp.114-18.

[12] See ref. note 2.

[13] See ref. note 11.

[14] See Spink, W., 'Ajanta's Chronology: Cave 1's Patronage', in *Chhavi*, II, Bharat Kala Bhavan, Benares, 1981, pp.144-57.

It seems evident that, by about 475, the Aśmakas had defeated Upendragupta of Ṛshika and had assumed control of the Ajanta region. One sign of this is the fact that Upendragupta's beautiful chaitya Cave19, which had been essentially finished when work on it broke off just before the Hiatus (472-474) was never used for worship—there is not a trace of soot from oil lamps or from incense burners on its painted surfaces. Furthermore, the residence cells in its forecourt were brashly and expediently cut away, presumably by the Aśmakas, in order to make a more convenient pathway to their own chaitya hall (Cave 26), upon which work was now vigorously proceeding once again, after having been abandoned immediately after c.468, when a flare-up of the old Aśmaka-Ṛshika antagonism had caused a drastic "Recession" at the site. Now that the control of the region was securely in the aggressive Aśmaka's hands, Ajanta began to flourish mightily once more. Work proceeded vigorously again on nearly all of the still-unfinished excavations, with the notable exception of those associated with the defeated Upendragupta. However, these halycon days were not to last for long, for only too soon the great Vākāṭaka overlord, Harisheṇa, died. This is suggested by the fact that his regal Cave 1, upon which work had been vigorously continued as soon as the Aśmakas had conquered and stabilized the region, was never quite fully finished and apparently neither dedicated nor used for worship, as would surely have been the case had its sponsor lived.[15]

Significantly, all consistent excavating activity at the site suddenly stopped shortly after Cave 1 was abandoned, presumably due to Harisheṇa's death, in c.477. Beginning immediately thereafter, in 478, patrons started rushing their shrine images to completion, as if time was fast running out and they had better finish these most essential elements of their caves while they still could. What the site's evidence suggests is that almost immediately after Harisheṇa's death, the new local rulers—the Aśmakas—took some action which was deleterious to the continuance of work at the site; and this conclusion is directly supported by the evidence of the *Daśakumāracharita*. This illuminating account reveals that shortly after Harisheṇa's death the Aśmakas took advantage of the weakness of his son and successor to incite a devastating insurrection against him. It seems evident that Ajanta's sudden decline was caused by the Aśmaka's focus now being shifted from the pursuits of piety to those of war.

By about 479, if our analysis of the situation is correct, the deteriorating political and economic situation had forced the original patrons to abandon their previously well-laid plans entirely. For the next year or two, the only "patronage" activity at the site involved the hasty and helterskelter production of hundreds of Buddha images (many of them unfinished), which were carved or painted on the walls of the caves so recently abandoned by their original patrons. The many quickly painted inscriptions reveal that these intrusive images were donated, for the most part, by the monks still resident at the site.[16] But by the early 480's, both the monks and the artists must have moved away, for it is clear from the surprisingly pristine condition of the latest paintings at the site and the total lack of any subsequent donations that

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[15] *Ibid.*

[16] See Schopen, G., 'Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions,' *Indo-Iranian Journal*, 21, (1979), pp.1-19.

Ajanta must have been virtually abandoned by then. Its fate was finally sealed by the collapse of the great Vākāṭaka dynasty, which had brought it to life barely two decades before. Ajanta then lay dormant and largly undisturbed until its "discovery" by an English soldier in 1819.

Consequent to the dramatic shattering of the Vākāṭaka empire shortly after 480, its former domains came under a patchwork rule for the next few dark decades. In the east, the coastal area of Konkan was consolidated by the 490's under what is described as the 'augmenting rule of the Traikūṭakas' in an inscription of 494 A.D. (Kalachuri era, 256) found at the Buddhist cave site at Kanheri.[17] This would seem to be the very time when this old Hīnayāna establishment, like Ajanta before it, enjoyed a Mahāyāna renaissance. The way perhaps already had been prepared by the likely domination of the region by the Vākāṭakas during Harisheṇa's reign; indeed, sculptured panels found around the base of the large structural stūpa (now ruinous) in the so-called cemetery area are quite distinctive in character and appear to belong to the period of Vākāṭaka, rather than Traikūṭaka, control. But a decade or two later, certainly by the 490's, there is every reason to believe that artists who had formerly worked at Buddhist sites such as Ajanta and Bagh, under the patronage of the Vākāṭakas or their feudatories, now were among those who were finding much-needed employment at Kanheri and other newly flourishing Buddhist establishments such as Magathan, Kondivte, Dattapada, Mahad, Lonad, Dhamnar, Kolvi, Binnayaga, and Nasik in this same general region. One need only compare the huge 23-foot standing Buddha carved at this time in the porch of the Kanheri chaitya hall to the equally large dying Buddha of about 478 A.D. in Ajanta's Cave 26, to see the connection. Not surprisingly, the iconographic and compositional complexity of subjects familiar from Ajanta, such as the Śrāvastī Miracle and the litany of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, now increases. Futhermore, representations of female bodhisattvas, which were rarely seen at Ajanta, and then only at the very end of its development, are very common here, as are Buddhas in the so-called European pose (*pralambapadāsana*), a type which appears only in very late contexts in Vākāṭaka cave sites. Among the hundreds of votive images which were now added to Kanheri's old Hīnayāna excavations, or included in the new Traikūṭaka period caves, perhaps the most surprising is an eleven-headed Avalokiteśvara, a type which will soon appear in Himalayan and T'ang Chinese art.

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[17] Mirashi, V.V., *Inscriptions of the Kalachuri-Chedi Era*, Ootacamund, 1955, pp.29-32: 'Kanheri Plate of the Traikūṭakas: (Kalachuri) Year 245'.

The Traikūṭakas added less than two dozen new caves to the far more extensive early group at Kanheri, but these are of considerable interest, because in their various architectural `features—plans and pillars and doorways and mouldings—they are clearly transitional between the Buddhist caves of the late Vākāṭaka period and the Hindu caves of the subsequent Early Kalachuri phase which developed in the Bombay region during the second quarter of the sixth century.[18]

Here, too, political circumstances were the fundamental cause of change. Although inscriptions prove that the Traikūṭakas were still dominant in Konkan in the first decade of the sixth century, the Matvan plates of 533 A.D. (Kalachuri era 284) prove that the Early Kalachuris had triumphed over them sometime before that date.[19] This victory may well have signalled the end of Buddhist patronage under the Traikūṭakas at sites like Kanheri and Nasik. Certainly it marked the starting point of a remarkable burst of Hindu—specifically Śaivite—excavating activity in western India by the greatest king of the Early Kalachuri dynasty, Kṛshṇarāja (acc. c.535). He, according to the Abhona grant of his son Śaṅkaragaṇa, "acquired wealth (*only*) for the sake of religious merit...and was devoted to Paśupati (Śiva) from his very birth".[20]

As has been shown elsewhere, stylistic and iconographic considerations prove that the famous Great Cave at Elephanta, located on an island just off the coast from Bombay,belongs not to the eighth century, to which it was long assigned, nor even to the seventh century but must have been started before the mid-sixth.[21] Thus, its excavation coincides perfectly with the reign of Kṛshṇarāja himself, and it can be seen as an appropriate reflection of his great and growing power. Such an attribution has recently been supported by the identification of the vast numbers of small copper coins which are found on the island as issues of Kṛshṇarāja himself.[22]

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[18] Leese, M., *The Traikūṭaka Dynasty and Kanheri's Second Phase of Buddhist Cave Excavation*, Ann Arbor: Univ. Microfilms, 1984.

[19] Gokhale, S., 'Matvan Plates of Vikramasena, K.284 (=533)', *Prof. G.H. Khare Felicitation Volume*, Poona.

[20] Ref. note 17, pp.38-43: 'Abhona Plates of Śaṅkaragaṇa: (Kalachuri) Year 347.'

[21] Ref. note 3.

[22] Gokhale, S., 'Elephanta Hoard of Copper Coins of Kṛṣṇarāja', paper read at All India Numismatic Conference, Indore, 1975.

Although the Great Cave is by far the grandest excavation of the Early Kalachuris on Elephanta Island, it is not the first. It was preceded there by a number of less ambitious undertakings. Cave 2 in particular was designed very much like a Vākāṭaka vihāra, judging from the "retardatory" character of its still-incomplete porch. Probably the first of these lesser caves at Elephanta to have been begun, judging from its "priority" location, may well have been created by the descendants of the craftsmen who worked at Ajanta some fifty years before.[23]

Even more striking connections with Vākāṭaka vihāras and their decorative motifs can be found in the remarkable and little-known Śaivite cave at Jogeshvari, a suburb of Bombay. Long assigned to the eigth or even ninth century—its confusion of plan and of sculptural organization considered the product of senility rather of adolescence—it has only recently been recognized as a revealing precursor of Elephanta's Great Cave.[24] Indeed, it is the earliest, and one of the largest, of all monumental Hindu cave temples! Its various courts and vestibules, as well as its square mini hall with a twenty-pillared hypostyle like one of the large Ajanta caves (but with a shrine in its center rather than at the rear) are strung out along the main east-west axis. Yet the illumination, and thus the visual focus, for the main hall comes through the three doorways and two windows of a long porch on the south side, which is designed and decorated like the front of a large Vākāṭaka vihāra. Scattered through this additively composed plan are most of the many Śaivite scenes and images later found so carefully arranged at Elephanta; however here they are of all different shapes and sizes, and disposed as if at random. Thus the cave at Jogeshvari, which must have been specifically dedicated to Śiva in his incarnation as the sage Lakulīśa—since four Lakulīśa images appear at various points along the main axis—is a kind of *omnium gatherum* for a vast number of forms and motifs which look backward to the Vākāṭaka past on the one hand and forward to the more successfully integrated Great Cave at Elephanta on the other. Quite possibly, along with the nearby Śaivite cave at Mandapeshwar, which contains much the same kind of material in a simpler format, and is clearly a design-source for the East Wing of the Great Cave at Elephanta, the Jogeshvari cave was begun during the reign of Kṛshṇarāja's father, perhaps in about 525 A.D. However, like the similarly early lesser caves on Elephanta Island, neither the Jogeshvari nor Mandapeshwar caves were ever finished. It seems likely that they were abandoned when Kṛshṇarāja himself came to power and focussed his attention and his funds on his still greater monument; but conceivably they were started in Kṛshṇarāja's own reign and were left unfinished because the Great Cave at Elephanta took precedence.

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[23] Had not Cave 2 already been started, the Great Cave at Elephanta would surely have been located at this convenient east-facing spot, at a great saving of time and expense.

[24] Spink, W., 'Jogeswari', *Journal of Indian Society of Oriental Art* (*Dr. Moti Chandra Commemorative Volume*), 1978, pp.1-35 and pl.I-XVI.

The Great Cave at Elephanta can be described as a vast square pillared hall to which three expansive pillared porches have been added on the east, west, and north. It seems likely that originally there was to have been a fourth such porch on the south, which would have made the cave "properly" symmetrical, with its main (eastern) axis focussed very clearly on the liṅgam shrine, which itself has been displaced for practical purposes toward the rear (west). However, possibly because the technical difficulties of carving a 75 foot deep inner court of "light well" at the south were daunting (but not impossible as we know from the evidence of the left court at Ellora's Cave 29), and/or possibly because the planners had decided that this south wall was a perfect location for the colossal Sadāśiva image now carved there, they gave up their idea for the fourth entrance, despite the surprising disruption of plan and the conflict of axes which resulted from their decision. The ultimate effect upon the devotee is, however, overwhelming since, although the ultimate ritual focus must be the cave's central shrine, the various paired reliefs showing Śiva in his various manifestations, which appear at the three entrances, reach a visual and conceptual culmintion in the gigantic multiheaded image that looms in the dark recesses of the south wall. King Kṛshṇarāja was quite possibly a direct descendant of the Vākāṭakata emperor Harisheṇa himself, and it is possible that he used this as a justification for his expansionist policy toward the east—the old Vākāṭaka domains—at about the middle of the sixth century.[25] In any case, it is evident that the Early Kalachuris had conquered the Aurangabad-Ellora region by the latter part of his reign, and continued to hold the region until the defeat of his grandson, Buddharāja, by the invading Chālukyas in about 600 A.D.

The Early Kalachuri presence in this region toward the east explains the sudden burst of Hindu patronage at Ellora shortly after 550 A.D. There, starting with the somewhat clumsily planned Cave 18, eight caves were excavated, all or most of them distinctly connected with the worship of Lakulīśa, just as their various Bombay-region prototypes had been.[26] The largest and most intriguing of these caves is the so-called Dhumar Lena, Cave 29, which "corrects" the confused plan of the Great Cave at Elephanta by making it conventionally symmetrical, with a main and two side entrances. All of the pairs of entrance reliefs found at Elephanta are repeated in Ellora Cave 29, although in a slightly different order. As for the three great south-wall reliefs at Elephanta, it is evident that they were going to be located as a sensible but hardly exciting "back-up" to shrine in Cave 29; but this work was never completed, since (as is evident from much other unfinished work in the cave) time obviously ran out before the cave's patron had realized his full intentions.[27]

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[25] Ref. note 3. 277-82.

Although Ellora Cave 29 is in every way a more carefully-measured and more "properly" organized cave than its prototype at Elephanta, it lacks the earlier cave's crescent energy. This is particularly true in its stolidly slack scupltures, which even the marvelously effective illumination of the cave (due to its location in an outcropping of rock) cannot approve. The Great Cave at Elephanta, by contrast, is all in all much gloomier; but it is filled with works of a radiant authority. Needless to say both of these caves were once painted; traces remain, particularly on their ceilings.

The most splendid sculpture of the Early Kalachuri phase at Ellora is to be found in Cave 21, the so-called Rāmeśvara Cave. Here the influence of Elephanta's Great Cave is evident not only in splendid carvings such as the Dancing Śiva, the Saptamātṛkās, but also in the clear connections of its porch-like plan with that of the earlier cave's East Wing.

Equally beautiful sculptures, and only somewhat less striking architectural connections with Bombay area prototypes are to be found in a number of the late sixth century Buddhist caves carved in the hills at nearby Aurangabad, close to the old Vākāṭala excavations must also have been done under Kalachuri patronage, or at least with their tacit approval. The figures of female bodhisattvas that flank the doorway of Cave 7's shrine, and the female dancer accompanied by six female musicians who, quite remarkably, performs before the Buddha in that cave's dark shrine, are among the supreme creations of this or any other period in Indian art.

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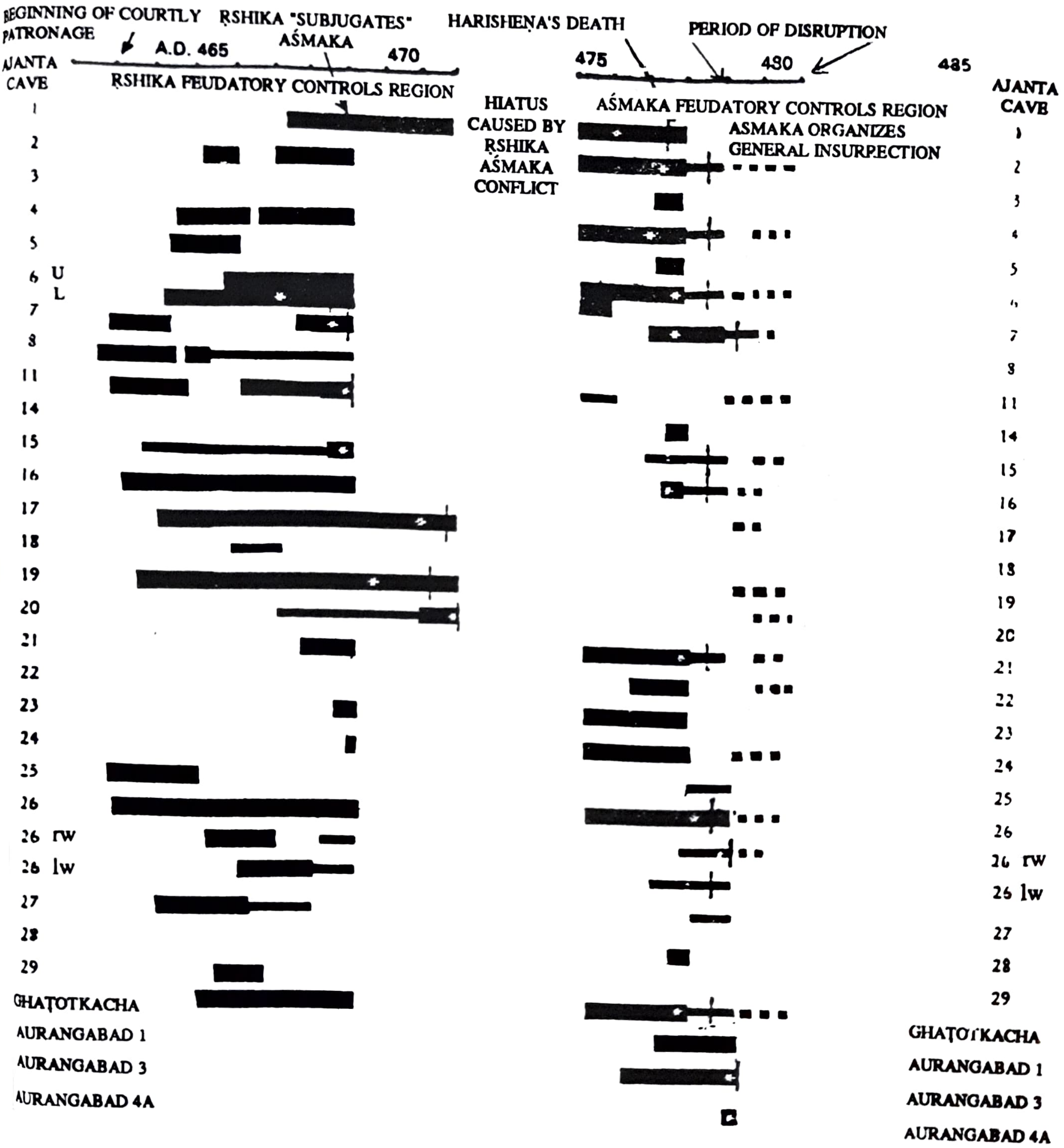
[26] Ref. note 5.

[27] Ref. note 3, 253-54.

TIME CHART



Known major patrons: Ajanta's Mahāyāna Phase (c.462-c.480 A.D.)

Cave 1: The Vākāṭaka emperor Harisheṇa: ruled c.460—c.477.

(*contd. on page 262*)

(contd. from page 261)

Cave 16: Varāhadeva, Harisheṇa's Chief Minister: in power until 478.

Caves 17, 18, 19 (the "Perfumed Hall"), and 20: King Upendragupta of Ṛshika, ruling over the Ajanta region until his defeat by the Aśmakas in 472 or shortly thereafter.

Cave 26 complex (consisting of Chaitya cave 26 and its wings, together with the adjacent Caves 25 and 27): The monk Buddhabhadra, "attached in friendship (to the minister of the mighty king of Aśmaka) through many successive births". Active patorn from 462-468; and 475-478.

Cave 4: Mathurādāsa, a wealthy devotee and "owner of the cave". Active patron from 462-468; and 475-478.

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*=image carved.
| =image painted.
Heavy lines show more vigorous activity. Broken lines show intrusive work.

20

Buddhist Art in the Gupta Age : Folk Ideas and Classical Form

Balkrishna Govind Gokhale

By the time the Gupta Age dawned (c.A.D. 320) Buddhism was already over seven hundred years old. The seamless garment of the unity of its doctrine and monastic life had been sundered four centuries before Samudragupta began his brilliant reign (c. A.D. 350-376). The great schism and splits within splits had given birth to a plethora of sects among which the orthodox, Theravāda, had retreated to a few centers in South India and more properly to Śrī Laṅkā. The Mahāyāna had dominated northern India and across the Vindhyas, the Deccan. Buddhism was now confronted by a resurgent Brāhmaṇism with old Vedic rituals revived in courtly circles and Purāṇic Hinduism, especially in its *bhakti* form, had become the faith of the masses. Buddhism was now confined, more or less, to scattered monastic communities endowed by kings, their officials and a few merchants and bankers.[1] Like the Buddhist doctrine and monastic life, Buddhist art also had undergone significant changes in its intent, form and manifestations. One significant change, the absorption of folk ideas and their transmutation into classical form, is the object of this presentation.

What is the evidence on which we can formulate hypotheses on the nature and content of the Buddhist art of the Gupta Age? The chronological parameters for the art history of the Gupta period may be assumed to fall between A.D. 350 and 550. The geographical extension may be assumed to cover major part of northern, eastern, western India and the Deccan. Political control and cultural influences may not be accepted as coterminus, and it is in this sense that the monuments of the Bombay-Deccan may be included within the domain of the classical art associated with the Gupta Age. Though the Guptas had no political control over the Ajanta or Karle/Kanheri area, the art of these monuments shares in the general spirit of the classicism reflected in the art of central India. Our evidence then, comes from examples of Buddhist sculptures from Sarnath, Mathurā, Sāṁchī and western India/Deccan and the murals of Ajanta.[2]

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[1] For a survey of Buddhism in the Gupta Age see Gokhale, B.G., 'Buddhism in the Gupta Age' in Bardwell L. Smith (ed.), *Essays On Gupta Culture* (Delhi, 1983), pp.129-53.

The major argument made here is that Gupta Buddhist art must be examined in the context of its ideological correlates and its technical achievements. The ideological dimension involves a transformation in the content and form of earlier folk ideas, attitudes and feelings into classical metaphysical and theological concepts. The technical dimension involves the transmutation of forms of earthiness, sheer and massive strength, obvious indulgence in pleasures of life and joviality into controlled strength, aristocratic/princely appearance and an intense spirituality. These are particularly evident in the concepts and figures of the Bodhisattvas, Nāgas, Kinnaras, Apsarās and the goddess Hāriti. The Bodhisattva of the Pali Buddhist *Jātakas* is generically distinct from the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. The Pali *Jātaka* Bodhisattva functions, more or less, as a convenient instrument for the accommodation and absorption of a mass of popular folk tales to convey a newly formalized Buddhistic ethic. The Bodhisattva of the Pali *Jātakas* and his *pāramitās* (perfections) belong to a late stratum in Pali canonical literature. The Gupta Bodhisattva is a person of transcendental wisdom and unbounded compassion (*prajñā* and *karuṇā*), ever skilful in devising appropriate means (*upāyakauśalya*) in securing release for a suffering world. His iconographic form is the end product of a folk movement related to Yaksha worship based on ritual adoration (*pūjā*) and devotion (*bhakti*). The Gupta Bodhisattva is no longer just an attendant, he is a savior in his own right. In this, wise folk ideas were transformed into a classical concept.

Much the same argument would apply to the adoption and accommodation of other folk ideas, such as the Yakshas and Yakshīs, Gandharvas, Kinnaras, Apsarās and Hāriti and their integration into a classical world in terms of iconic and artistic idioms.

From the early stages of its evolution as a religion, Buddhism comprised two distinct segments in an uneasy symbiosis. We may call these the monastic/elite and the laity/folk. Already in the older part of the *Nikāyas* we encounter a fourfold enumeration of the Buddhist community, namely *Bhikku/Bhikkhuṇī*, and *upāsaka/upāsikā*—monks/nuns and male/female lay devotees. The influence of the lay groups on the development of Buddhist doctrine, monastic life and ritual art is one of the less explored themes in the study of Buddhism in India. Who were the Buddhist laity? They covered a wide spectrum, ranging from kings, queens and their courtiers to merchants, bankers, artisans and peasants, scattered across the entire urban/rural spread of major areas of the subcontinent. Along with the monastic-lay paradigm we have, in social terms the aristocratic and folk dimensions in Buddhistic social, and by implication, art history. Just as the doctrinal and ritual needs and demands of the monastic community and the laity were different, similar was the case in the life-styles and cultural ideas of the aristocracy and the common people. This is not to imply that a rigid and unwavering line separated the two, for there were differences and continuity dividing and joining the two. Rather, the point to be made is that the elites explicated categories of ideas and forms which emphasized or obscured aspects of ideas and forms of culture of the common people. The transformation of folk ideas into aristocratic or classical form was an on-going process in Buddhist history.[3]

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[2] Harle, J.C., *Gupta Sculpture* (Oxford, 1974), pp.6-8.

From its very inception, Buddhism had to deal with two elements of the folk culture, folk deities and folk tales, through a process of accomodation, absorption and transformation. This was begun in the life-time of the Buddha himself, as suggested by the evidence from the *Nikāyas*. Along with the old Vedic gods such as Brahmā and Śakra/Indra, the Buddha speaks of a group of folk deities, the Yakshas and Yakshīs, Nāgas, Kinnaras and Gandharvas. Just as the Master referred to the Vedas with tolerance and sometimes sarcasm, he also makes use of folk tales which later appear in their Buddhistic garb as the *Jātakas*. These folk deities and tales provided a rich *repertoire* for embellishment and edification in the evolving Buddhist art. The Buddhist monuments of the earlier phase, the pre-Mahāyāna segment, reflect this process of absorption of folk deities and folk tales at Bharhut, Sāṁchī Bhaja, Karle, Kanheri and Amarāvatī. By the first Century B.C., a new and powerful religious movement, *bhakti*, begins to dominate religious ideas and art-forms in India. Though some scholars have suggested that its roots lay in the old Vedic concepts of *śraddhā/saddhā*, it is more probable that the origins of the *bhakti* cult came from folk religions dwelling either at the periphery of hieratic religion or even beyond its pale.[4] A.K. Coomaraswamy has suggested that the Yaksha cult was rooted in the *bhakti* sentiment. Pāli literary evidence indicates the existence of abodes (temples) of the Yakshas (*bhavanas* and *āyatanas*) at some of which the Buddha himself seems to have sojourned from time to time. A number of Yakshas and Yakshīs are portrayed and labeled at Bharhut and Sāṁchī. Coomaraswamy has also suggested that it is more fruitful to look for the origins of the Buddha/Bodhisattva icons from Mathurā in earlier Yaksha prototypes. The morphology of the early Mathurā Buddha/Bodhisattva images suggests strong Yaksha resemblances. The transition from folk idea/form to classical icon was contrived by transforming the Yaksha into a Yogī of a special Buddhist form through the delineation of the accepted marks of the Great Person—*mahāpurisa-lakkhaṇāni* such as the *ushṇīsha, urṇā,* elongated ears and arms reaching to the knees—*ājānubāhu.*

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[3] For development of Buddhism as a religion, see Gokhale, B.G., *Buddhism and Aśoka* (Baroda, 1948), pp.25-57.

Aspects of the old Yaksha cults facilitated an easy intrusion into Buddhism. Many of these Yakshas were regarded as special protectors of merchants, especially caravaneers. Of these, the most celebrated were Maṇibhadra and Pūrṇabhadra, and inscriptional and literary evidence indicates the existence of specially set up shrines to these Yakshas. They were worshipped by the *pūjā* mode of ritual involving offering of flowers, burning of lamps and ritual offering of food. In the sculptures of Bharhut and Sāṁchī there are representations of *stūpas* being honored in the form of *pūjā*, with figures before them who could be representatives of the common folk as well as royalty. The standing figures of Yakshas are indicated as attendants or guardians, whereas the Yakshīs are portrayed as symbols of fertility and prosperity.[5]

The concept of a Yaksha as an attendant/protector is specially noticeable in the case of Vajirapāṇi Yakkha, who figures in several *suttas* of the *Nikāyas.* He is particularly noted for his threat to anyone who refused to answer the Buddha's well-meant questions to split his head with his *vajira.* Buddhaghosha explains Vajirapāṇi as the name of *Sakka,* but this is perhaps a case of confusing one tradition (that of the Vedas) with another (that of the Yakkhas).[6] Now Vajirapāṇi emerges as a Bodhisattva in the Buddhist art of the period from Mathurā, Kanheri and particularly Ajanta. Artistic needs necessitated the positing of another attendant, who now appears as Padmapāṇi. The two symbols, the *Vajra* (thunderbolt) and *Padma* (lotus) have pre-Buddhistic folk associations. In the *Therīgāthā* there are verses attributed to the nun *Vajirā* (the name is significant), whose use of the simile of the chariot being the designation of an assemblage of its parts becomes standard method of interpretation of the early Buddhist views on the nature of the person. It is quoted with evident approval by Nāgasena in the *Milindapañha.*[7] *Vajra*, in folk understanding, was a symbol of primeval strength and power. The lotus occurs as a symbol of purity in innumerable similes in the *Nikāyas*. The Yaksha/Bodhisattva Padmapāṇi now emerges as the Being of Mercy who postpones his own Nirvāṇa and remains in the world to convey the notion of affirmation and celebration of life, if only to transcend it in the end. Walter Spink has suggested that the structural composition of Cave I at Ajanta must be understood as unitary in intention. The sense is that the entire structure was conceived as one whole, and the excavation itself, (the arrangement of the interior including the shrine and the murals) are organically related to each other. It is here that the folk elements are transformed and transmuted through the magic of the artists into a brilliant classicism seldom equalled elsewhere.[8] The Bodhisattvas are now princely figures complete with diadems or crowns and a profusion of jewelry. They are, in these murals, conceived in over life-size proportions surrounded by a teeming world of humans and quasidivine figures. Heinrich Zimmer aptly observes: "The figure of the Bodhisattva has all the qualities that youth, high birth, noble character, and religious temperament can produce...strong masculine limbs; a broad chest; a well-set neck; a high intellectual forehead; large, meditative eyes; firm lips; and an elegant nose. The eyebrows, slightly raised, and the highlight on the nose and chin give an air of spirituality to the countenance. The supple body is full of latent vigor. It is the youthful body of a noble prince, standing with a graceful bearing and filled with an ineffable sentiment of detachment among the joyful figures of life. On the head is a high crown or tiara with large blue sapphires, emblematic of royal birth".[9] Mere masculinity of the earlier Yaksha figure is now translated into controlled strength and vigor; the earlier exuberance is transmuted into a sophisticated joy of life ensuing from cultivated royal or aristocratic origins.

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[4] For *bhakti* in Buddhism, see Gokhale, B.G., 'Bhakti In Early Buddhism' in J. Lele (ed.), *Journal Of African and Asian Studies,* XV, 1/2, pp.16-26.

[5] See Coomaraswamy, A.K., *Yakṣas* (New Delhi, 1971, Pt.I) pp.4-28.

[6] *Ibid.,* pp.28-31; for Bodhisattva concept see Warder, A.K., *Indian Buddhism* (Delhi, 1970), pp.355-60; Kashyap, P., (ed.), *The Digha Nikāya* (Nalanda, 1958), p.82.

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[7] Shastri, Dwarkadas, (ed.), *The Milinda Pañho* (Varanasi, 1979), p.21.

[8] Spink, W., 'Ajanta: A Brief History' in Pal (ed.), *Aspects Of Indian Art*, (Leiden, 1972), pp.49-58.

The sentiment of *bhakti* toward the Bodhisattva was based in the devotee's faith and confidence in the Bodhisattva as capable of being a savior. Already by the middle of the third century of the Christian era Avalokiteśvara was firmly established as a cult figure. He is described as saving people from fire, flood and shipwreck. He saves travelling merchants from the depredations of robbers and helps childless women secure children. He wards off attacks from wild elephants, lions and cobras. The litany of this Bodhisattva is carved in a number of caves in Ajanta, Ellora and Aurangabad; an indication of the popularity of the cult. These aspects of the cult are closely related to the powers ascribed to some of the Yakshas whose worship was very popular with merchants.[10]

We may now refer to two other elements from the folk world being absorbed into the new classical Buddhism. One is the figure of the Nāga. At Sāṁchī and Bharhut there are numerous representations of human figures surmounted by the hood of a cobra. In the *Mahāvagga* there is the story of the Nāga Muchalinda, who protected the Buddha from sun and rain as he sat meditating by raising his hood over the Buddha. The Nāga is associated with primeval waters and the process of creations, fertility and wealth.[11] Along with the Yakshas, Nāgas were worshipped in the folk tradition and were later accommodated in the evolving Buddhism as a religion of the laity. The finest classical expression of this Nāga cult is the beautiful sculpture depicting the Nāga-King and his Queen seated on a throne and attended by a female *chauri*-bearer in Cave XIX at Ajanta. This is a *chaitya* cave with numerous Buddha figures, and the sculpture of the Nāga-King and his Queen is on the left side wall. This panel may have been placed where it is either for its decorative effect or, more probable, it is an instance of accommodation and absorption of a folk cult now rendered in a classical idiom of accepted iconographic poses, crowns and jewelry.

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[9] Zimmer, H., *The Art Of Indian Asia*, (New York, 1955), I, p.189; Also see Basham, A.L., 'The Evolution of the Concept of the Bodhisattva' in Kawamura, J.S., (ed.), *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhism* (Waterloo, Ontario, 1983), pp.30-32.

[10] Kem, H., (trans.), *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* (New York, 1963), pp.406-09.

[11] *Mahāvagga*, I. 3.

Cave II at Ajanta has a panel containing sculptures of Hāriti and Pañchika. The cave is a *vihāra*. Hāriti started out as an ogress married to the Yaksha Pañchika. Hāriti was in the habit of devouring children and was weaned away from her dreadful activity by the Buddha. From being a destroyer of children, she was transformed into their protector and was worshipped for that role. She is also a symbol of fertility and perhaps that of the ancient mother goddess. As in the case of the Nāga panel, the placing of the Hāriti panel in a *vihāra* cave is also an instance of accommodation/absorption of a folk cult into classical Buddhism.

The other elements of the folk genre are to be found in the numerous *mithuna* scenes involving Apsarās, Gandharvas, Kinnaras and Yakshas. The *mithuna* or erotic dalliance is pre-Buddhistic in its origins. It signifies security, wealth, protection and prosperity. The *motif* formed an integral part of folk religion and art, and Buddhism simply accommodated it into its iconic representational world associated with sacred art. These representations are amorous in intention and manifestation, but are not orgiastic as is the case with Khajuraho and Konark.[12]

We may now turn to a discussion of the use of the *Jātakas* in the art of the Gupta Age. Ajanta has at least twenty *Jātakas* and two *avadānas* in varying states of preservation. The *Jātakas* are *Khantivādi, Sibi, Miga, Mahājanaka, Śyāma, Sutasoma, Mahāhaṁsa, Chhaddanta, Mahāumagga, Nigrodhamiga, Mahākapi, Mahisa, Hatthī, Mātuposaka* and the celebrated *Vessantara.* The two *avadānas* are *Siṁhala* and *Pūrṇa*. The folk tale is a vital part of folk literature and the content of most of these stories precede the emergence of Buddhism. The process of absorption of these pre-Buddhistic folk tales into a species of Buddhist literature was contrived through the use of the Bodhisattva motif. Each *Jātaka* is structured in five parts...*pachchuppanna vatthu, atīta vatthu, gāthā, veyyākaraṇa* and *samodhāna*. The first explains how the story came to be told by the Buddha as the occasion is related to an incident involving a monk or nun, king or merchant or Devadatta. The second part has the story proper. The third part, regarded as the most ancient stratum, either summarizes the contents of the story of the past and/or expresses its moral. The fourth part is an exposition of the meaning of the verses. In the final part, the main characters are identified, such as the Buddha, Devadatta, or some other person.[13]

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[12] See Gokhale, B.G., 'The Mithuna Motif in Early Buddhist Art' in *Indica*, XIII-1/2 (March-September 1976), pp.49-58.

The inclusion of these stories in the *repertoire* of Buddhist art is based on their two-fold nature of being a vehicle for the transmission of Buddhist ethical ideas and values, and their folk origins and wide circulation among the laity. The ideas emphasized are *karma,* rebirth, non-injury, charity and compassion. Many of these stories figure in the art of Sāṁchī and Bharhut, Amarāvatī and Gandhāra, indicating their physical spread over widely separated parts of the subcontinent. The most famous of these stories are the *Vessantara, Sibi, Mahājanaka, Khantivādi, Chhaddanta, Nigrodhamiga* and *Mahākapi.* Pre-Gupta art had already fixed the major components of the stories to be delineated in art.

Buddhist art, from its Sāṁchī-Bharhut phase to Amarāvatī and Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, had been structured in its narrative content into two distinct but inter-related parts. One of these components was the narrative of the Buddha story, first through the use of specific symbols and later through iconic representation of the Buddha. The major incidents selected for depiction were the conception, birth, renunciation, enlightenment, preaching, and final passing away of the Buddha. To these were added incidents such as the Muchalinda, Ajātasattu's visit, conversion of the Kassapa brothers, conversion and re-accommodation of Nanda, Buddha's visit to Kapilavatthu, the Sāvatthī miracle, the Devadatta episodes, the Pārileyyaka story, and defeat of Māra. These together formed the classical conspectus. Alongside of this there stood the *Jātaka* material. A gradually evolving consensus from Sāṁchī-Bharhut to Nāgārjunakoṇḍa seems tō have settled on a specified number of stories to be regarded as standard contents of this folk *repertoire.* These stories were the *Chhadanta, Vessantara, Mahākapi, Śyāma, Sibi, Champeyya, Sasa, Mahājanaka* and *Vidurapaṇḍita Jātakas.*[14] At

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[13] See Jones, J.G., *Tales and Teachings of the Buddha* (London, 1979), pp.3-29; Cone, M. and Gombrich, R.F., *The Perfect Generosity of Prince Vessantara* (Oxford, 1977), pp.xvii-xxxv.

[14] For identification of the *Jātakas* and *Avadānas* see Gupte, R.S. and Mahajan, B.D., *Ajanta, Ellora and Aurangabad Caves* (Bombay, 1962) Chapter V; for *Jātakas* at Sāṁchī see Marshall, J., *A Guide To Sāñchī* (Calcutta, 1955), pp.52, 58, 59, 78, 81; Mitra, D., *Sāṁchī* (New Delhi, 1973), pp.25, 27, 29; for Bharhut see Cunningham, A., *The Stūpa of Bharhut* (Varanasi, 1962), pp.50-51. For Amarāvatī, Barrett, D., *Sculptures from Amarāvatī in the British Museum* (London, 1954), pp.72, 73; for Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, Krishan Murthy, K., *Nāgārjunakoṇḍa* (Delhi, 1977), pp.12, 79.

Sāṁchī-Bharhut "the method of narrating the stories is the simplest, most direct, and the language most unaffected. Indeed, men and women of Bharhut have almost a tribal simplicity...they do not express any emotion; nor are they idealized in any way. Now, these are characteristics also of the *Jātaka* stories themselves, and indeed of all tribal and folk stories of the world." What is noteworthy is the "primitiveness" of portrayal.[15] The reasons for the inclusion of these folk takes are obvious. First, there was their tremendous popularity. Secondly, there was their dramatic content. And finally, their availability for use in communicating a Buddhist ethic and ethos. These tales then provided a means of bringing together hieratic and folk elements in Buddhist art and culture. The perceptible changes are in the domain of narrative style, for the content and message were long fixed. The cult image was conceived and executed in hieratic tones and style. They were controlled by the 'literary' quality of the cult image. The narrative *Jātaka* style was freer, more flowing, rhythmical and earthy. The scenes depicted had exuberance and vitality, and an uncontrolled sensuousness. Sheila L. Weiner has argued that with the growth and preponderance of the cult image, and its refinement from Mathurā to Sarnath, there was a proportionate decline in the vitality of the narrative tradition concerned with the *Jātaka* tales.[16] This may well be valid in sculptural representations of the *Jātakas* from Sāṁchī-Bharhut to the Krishna Valley. In sculpture, because of the exigential space, the technique of continuous narration (wherein space and time had to be telescoped into a given framework, increasing constraints on uncontrolled exuberance and sensuousness) had become increasingly essential because of the preponderance of the cult iconic representations. In the art of the murals different material conditions prevailed. When we encounter the *Jātaka* illustration at Ajanta, the old exuberance, vitality and sensuousness reemerg. The expression is no longer limited. The emergence of the new Buddhism of the Mahāyāna variety based on the emotion of *bhakti* also helped accentuate the elements of exuberance, vitality and sensuousness. *Saṁsāra* and *Nirvāṇa* are no longer sharply severed and unrelated parts of an ideological continum. They are, rather, two sides of the same coin and are finally joined together in meaning and expression. The cult images and *Jātaka* murals now appear as aspects of an integrated whole, a single *weltanschauung*. The ancillary and illustrative *Jātaka* material is now worked into an integrated structural whole, and the result is a classicism of intention and technique. The *Jātaka-Avadāna* material is no longer regarded as "frieze" of decorative or illustrative value, but exists in its own right as an essential and organic part of the Buddhist story. Classicism is now expressed through a vastness of conception and technique. Just as the old Yaksha morphology of the Buddha/Bodhisattva representation is transformed into a royal or princely anatomy and physiology, the characters and scenes of the *Jātaka-Avadāna* folk elements are transmuted into a "feudal" classical idiom. Scenes are spread out over large spaces. Figures of humans, animals, birds, gods and semi-divine beings, flowers and plants, crowd the scene. The sequential parts of the narrative are now conventionally spelled out and separated by the use of walls, rocks or trees, thereby helping the narrative to gently ease or blend into a continum of space and time. The figures are no longer tribal prototypes, earthy or "primitive", but acquire a classical appearance in purpose and expression. The earlier folk ideas, material frames and intentions are now transformed into a world of classical earnestness, controlled movement and restrained sensuousness. The classical spirit finally subsumes the folk world symbolized by the unsullied and pristine beauty of the lotus rising from the depths of agitated water and glutinous earth.

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[15] Ray, N.R., *Maurya and Post-Maurya Art* (New Delhi, 1975), pp.65, 68.

[16] Weiner, Sheila L., *Ajanta* (Berkeley, 1977), pp.80-81.

21

Performing Arts in the Gupta Age

Anupa Pande

Performing arts may be said to be the link between purely literary arts on the one hand and the plastic arts on the other. All art is the creation of a symbol, expressive of felt social values. The general term for social values was *purushārtha* while their expression as felt experiences was called *rasa*. All the arts were supposed to be symbols which communicated *rasa*. In the theatre, *rasa* was suggested by the imitation of life, and its effect was heightened by the proper use of music and dance. Dance, music and drama thus constituted the basic theatric arts. In sculpture and painting, an attempt was made to present static vignettes of any emotional scene or story and it could be regarded as drama or dance preserved in stone or lines and colours. On the other hand, the heart of drama itself lies in speech or dialogue which naturally belong to the literary arts. The theatric arts serve to concretise feelings and speech into concrete action and inspire their further embodiment in plastic form.

What *Śilpaśāstra* is to building and plastic arts, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* is to the performing arts. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* remains the standard and authoritative work for performing arts, and even though its composition may have been pre-Gupta, it continued to provide guidance and inspiration throughout the ancient period. A number of commentraries were, however, written on it during the Gupta and early post-Gupta period. Besides, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and its commentary, Purāṇic texts, literary works, inscriptions, sculptures and paintings illustrate certain aspects of the theory and practice of the performing arts in the Gupta period.

The constituents of drama were *nṛtya* i.e. *bhāvāśraya abhinaya*, *nṛtta* i.e. pure dance and *nāṭya* i.e. *vākyārthābhinaya*. All this was set to the accompaniment of music—vocal and instrumental. The performing arts, as all the other arts, had reached full devleopment in the Gupta age. The importance attached to the dramatic arts in this age is apparent as they have been termed 'visual sacrifice' (*krāntuṁ chakshushām*)[1] by the greatest dramatist of the age. The dramatic art was one of the chief amusements of the people. Terms like *saṅgītaśālā*, *prekshāgṛha*, *raṅgaśālā*, occur for the theatre.

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[1] *Mālāvikāgnimitram* (ed. C.R. Devadhara, Motilal Banarsidass), 1.4.

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* mentions the theatre for the gods, the kings and other people as being distinct from each other. This refers to the temple theatre, the palace theatre and public theatre.[2] It was customary to engage courtesans for dancing or singing in temples before the images of gods in the morning as well as in the evening. The *Meghadūta* (*Pūrvamegha*, 38-39) refers to the dancing girls in the Mahākāla temple at Ujjain who performed the dance of Lord Śiva i.e. *Tāṇḍava*. Kauṭilya mentions the *devadāsīs*. They were connected with temples and were studiously taught the arts of music and dancing.[3] The *Kuṭṭinīmatam* refers to the enacting of *Ratnāvalī* at a temple at Kāśī. It was usual for palaces to have a *saṅgītaśālā* as well as a *prekshāgṛha*. The *saṅgītaśālā* was the music hall or the concert hall where the queens and ladies of the harem and courtesans practiced their music and dance. The *prekshāgṛha* was the auditorium. In the *Mālavikāgnimitram* (Acts I and II) Mālavikā practices dance at the *saṅgītaśālā* and the king witnesses the dance performance of Mālavikā and princess Irāvatī at the royal auditorium. Another lady practices music at the royal *saṅgītaśālā* in the *Śākuntalam* (Act V). The *Arthaśāstra* (Book II, Ch. XVII) lays down that from the age of eight years a prostitute shall hold musical performance before the king. The third was the theatre for the public where all family members, male and female, old and young, could witness a play. In the *Daśakumāracharita*[4] we have a description of a courtesan Rāgamañjarī, at whose performance the citizens gather and watch with great expectations. She dances in a gathering called the *pañchavīra goshṭhī*. She performs her dance accompanied by both song and instrumental music, on the part of the stage termed the *raṅgapīṭha*. The public theatre was confined not just to the courtesans: the citizens performed, participated and witnessed dramas. According to Kauṭilya, most citizens should cooperate in preparing for a public play. "And if a man who has not cooperated in preparing for a public play or spectacle is found witnessing it, he shall be compelled to pay double the value of the aid due from him."

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[2] *Nāṭyaśāstra* (Kavyamala edition), 2. 11-12.

[3] Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra*, Book II, Ch XXVIII, tr. Shamasastry.

[4] *Daśakumāracharita*, *Uttarapīṭhikā*, II.30.

The general features of the architecture of the theatre are described here.[5] Three different forms of the theatrical hall were visualised—viz. rectangular, square and triangular. The sizes could be big, middling or small. Generally, the hall was conceived as *dvibhūmika* or two storyed, which apparently meant that the elevation of the theatre had the appearance of being divided into two storeys. The stage occupied the western half of the dramatic hall. The eastern half consisted of the auditorium. At the back of the western-most end of the stage was located the green room or *nepathya*. Its length is half of the stage (*raṅga*) which itself appeared to have been divided into two parts, namely *rangaśirsha* and *raṅgapīṭha*, the former was to the west of the latter which was not so elevated. The green room was separated from the *raṅgaśīrsha* by a curtain and a central pillar. The *nepathya* was connected with the *raṅgaśīrsha* by two doors—one on each side of the pillar. In front of the pillar was located the orchestra or *kutapa*. On both sides of the orchestra *raṅgapīṭha* and projecting beyond the walls of the hall stood two ornamental verandahs or *mattavāraṇī*. The eastern half of the hall was built as an auditorium with tiers of elevated seats. Many ornamentally constructed pillars studded the building. The pillars had stepped bases, capitals, brackets, carvings, including figures called *śālabhañjikā*. The ceiling was appearently shaped like the vault of a cave. The walls were plastered, white-washed and painted. There were distinct entrances for the actors and audience. The openings were arranged with reference to sound accoustics.

The stage did not use properties except sparingly. *Āhāryābhinaya* has been explained as preparations in the green room—*nepathyajo vidhiḥ*.[6] *Āhārya* was classified into four types viz.: (a) *pusta* or model work, (b) *alaṁkāra* or decoration, (c) *aṅgarachanā* or make-up in accordance with role, and (d) *sajīva* or different objects represented on the stage. Model work or *pusta* was of three kinds following different measures and forms. *Sandhima* included productions made up from joining pieces of bamboo or birch (*kiliñja*) and covering them up with skin or clothes. The second was termed *vyājima*. Here some mechanical means (*yantreṇa*) was used for moving the model. The *Mṛchchhakaṭikam* has a toy clay-cart. The *Bālarāmāyaṇa* has mechanical dolls. The third variety was called *veshṭima*, where a covering by lac or wax was used. In general, mountains, vehicles, *vimānas*, shields, armours etc. were included in *pusta*. Mythical animals and monsters could be made of bamboo and cloth. Weapons were not to be made of hard material. Theatrical weapons were not to be made of iron nor were they to be substantial lest they be a burden.

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[5] *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Ch.2.

[6] *Ibid.*, Ch. 21.

Theatrical implements were to be light and made of wood, leather, cloth, lac, bamboo pieces, etc. After being constructed by bamboo pieces they were to be covered with coloured cloth and given the shapes of the objects represented. If suitable cloth was not at hand, then palm leaves and birch bark could be used. The weapons could be made of straw, bamboo splits, lac, gourd, etc. in diverse shapes. Models (*sārūpyāṇi*) could be created of straw, bark, gourd etc. Diverse shapes resembling the original could be made of clay, gourd, cloth, wax, lac, bits of mica, *atasi*, *sāṇa*, *bilva*, etc. It should be remembered, however, that Sanskrit theatre was a combination of *lokadharma* (realism) and *nāṭyadharma* (theatrical representation). "The kind of production which depends on much use of wooden machines (*kāshṭhayantra bhūyishṭha*) is not to be used in our theatrical productions because it implies a great deal of labour (*khedavāha*). Whatever substances of diverse characteristics are found in real life, the imitation of their forms are a means to be used in the theatre."

The preparation of the actors in the green room included the use of elaborate make-up, costumes, jewellery and ornaments. The make-up of actresses included the painting of eyes, lips and teeth as also the painting of their feet. The *Mālavikāgnimitram* (Acts I and II) has an interesting reference to the thin stage costumes (*viralanepathya*) of the dancers which exhibited the grace of all their limbs (*sarvāṅga-saushṭhavābhivyakte*). This is also borne out by Gupta sculptures which show the actresses in thin, almost transparent, stage costumes, as in the Pavaya, Gwalior, scene. The dancer wears a breast cloth (*kucha paṭa*), which is taken round her breasts, tied in a knot over the left shoulder and then falls in heavy folds. In the Deogarh dance scenes the actresses wear sewn clothes. Some wear sewn bodices, and *dhotīs* in the same manner as men wear today; others wear transparent thin skirts that cling to their body and come down to the ankles. The *prima donna* had a rich costume—a skirt that comes up to her knees and falls down in flames and another sewn garment covering her legs to the ankles—something like the tight pyjamas worn beneath skirts of present day classical dancers. A distinctive feature which marks all these actresses is their elaborate head dress and ear-rings. They sport elaborate hair buns, curled forelocks, and ringlets. In the Bagh paintings, the ladies of the orchestra are shown wearing well-fitting *cholīs* of various colours. In the *Hallisaka* scene of Cave No. 4 or *raṅga mahal*, some dancers are semi-nude, some wear half sleeves, and yet some others sport full sleeves with flower-type pattern *kameezs.*

Hair style and costumes were to be distinctive of the character represented. Thus, *muni kanyās* were to have a costume suitable for their dwelling in forests, the gandharva women were to have sapphires to decorate them and white teeth and black clothes. When representing women separated from their husbands, their dress was to be dusty and their hair bound up in a single plait. Actors had to have their limbs and complexions painted in diverse colours to suit the type of character they were required to represent. This enabled them to represent gods, demons, gandharvas etc. Thus gods, yakshas and apsarās were to be fair. Kings were to have a lotus complexion, fair or dark. Happy mortals were to be represented as fair, the sick or evil-doers as black. The tribals and southerners were to be generally represented as swarthy, Śaka, Yavana and other northerners as fair, Brāhmaṇas, and Kshatriyas as fair and Vaiśyas and Śūdras as dark. The colours of the costumes, too, are named according to the conventions of representation. Thus, Buddhist and other monks were to be dressed in ochre coloured robes and the Pāśupatas were to have variegated robes. Warriors were to be shown in martial attire with armour, bow and quiver. Kings were to have crowns, ministers and merchants were represented as wearing turbans. Many types of religieux had shaven heads while crooks and rakes were to keep curly hair.

The term *naṭa* is held to have denoted a variety of allied professionals viz., dancers, acrobats, jugglers and actors. The precise history of these terms and the social history of the professions is not clear. The evidence of Pāṇini, Baudhāyana, Kauṭilya and Patañjali clearly indicates that the *naṭas* were professional actors with their own tradition and customary law (*āmnāya* or *dharma*) and teachers (*nāṭyāchāryas*) who gave instructions in a variety of skills. They were organised in troupes under a leader often styled *Sūtradhāra*. These wandering troupes were sometimes treated as subcastes and despised, especially for their low morals. However, they also laid claim to professional excellence, respect from connoisseurs and popularity from spectators. Even sages and royal personages were well-versed in music and dance, participated in stage acting and art was regarded as having a divine prototype. Samudragupta's expertise and love for music is evident from his inscriptions and coins. In the Allahabad Pillar Inscription he is said to have been proficient in music and as excelling Tumburu and Nārada. Nārada is traditionally believed to have invented the *vīṇā*. Samudragupta's skill in the *vīṇā* is borne out by his lyrist type gold coins, in which he is shown playing the *vīṇā*. In the *Raghuvaṁśa* king Agnivarṇa is described as skilled in the performing arts. Queens and royal ladies were well-versed in the arts of music, dance (*nṛtta*) and *abhinaya* and could even perform in the palace theatre. Learned authors had actors as their companions. It must, thus, be concluded that the actors belonged to several social strata—the lowly, wandering in villages, as well as the affluent and accomplished, who enjoyed the patronage and even company of the learned poets and royal courts. They not only performed as instructed but also shared in the aesthetics of the enterprise.

The actors included men as well as women. Although men also played female parts and were then known as *bhrukuṁsa*,[7] it was quite usual for actresses to play such roles. The use of *kaiśikī-vṛtti* (i.e. the graceful mode of acting) in particular made the employment of actresses imperative. Again, they were indispensable for singing. It was usual for actresses to render female roles. Occasionally they also played the role of men. The playing of roles is in fact, divided into three types[8] viz., *anurūpa, bṛhadrūpa* (*virūpa*) and *avirūpānurūpiṇī* (*rūpānurūpa*). Where the actors and actresses play the roles of the characters of the opposite sex we have the third type.

High qualifications have been laid down for the *Nāṭyāchārya* or *Sūtradhāra*, who was the instructor, the director of the play and himself the principal actor. He was to be well-versed in both the theory and practice of the art (*śāstre cha prayoge cha*). Again "some exhibit acting very well in their own person, while others show greater skill in imparting the art to another; he who excels in both these qualities deserves a pre-eminent place among teachers."[9] The royal houschold had its own *Nāṭyāchārya* or instructor well-versed in his family tradition (*kulavidyā*) of theatrics. He was to teach the royal ladies and the talented inmates of the harem music, dance and acting and arrange performances and competitions. He had a place of respect in the royal household. He was expected not only to be learned and skilled but full of moral qualities. He alone was authorized to perform the ritual of worshipping the gods. Since the play began with such worship, he introduced it and often took the leading role. He was assisted by his wife who was an actress or *naṭī*. He was also assisted by other male actors in the prologue called *Sthāpaka* or *Pāripārśvaka*. Actresses were also to be highly qualified. They were required to be accomplished in various arts including music, dance and acting.

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[7] Cf. *Mahābhāshya ad Ashṭādhyāyi*. 4.13; *Amarakośa*, 1.7.11.

[8] *Nāṭyaśāstra*, 26. 1-4.

[9] *Mālāvikāgnimitram*, 1. 16.

About acting itself, it has to be remembered that it was a combination of realistic representation and conventional gestures and symbolism called *lokadharmī* and *nāṭyadharmī* respectively. The conventional element was the most prominent in the representation of character-types and their identification, as also in the ways in which invisible elements and actions were indicated. Realism, on the other hand, was prominent in the acting of emotions through gestures. So detailed and thorough was the training in such acting that the whole body was used as a tool for suggesting a wide gamut of feelings.

About the nature of *nāṭya* or drama, we may say that it was the imitation of social life or happenings of the world. The purpose was entertainment and instruction. *Vastu* (plot), *netā* (hero) and *rasa* or the mood were the three basic constituents of drama. If we add *vṛtti* (i.e. styles or modes of representation) and *abhinaya*, dance and music, *lakshaṇa* and *alaṁkāra*, we get the six principal elements of drama.

The play began with a general prologue, an idea which had impressed the German poet Goethe. The first dramatic item in the *pūrvaraṅga* was the *Nāndī* or a ceremonial prayer offered for the guarding of the play from obstacles. The *Sūtradhāra* recited the *Nāndī* in *madhyama svara*. The *Nāndī* expressed a benediction for the gods, Brāhmaṇas and rulers. An important element of the *pūrvaraṅga* was *prarochana* or introduction. The *Sūtradhāra* and/or *Sthāpaka*, *Pāripārśvaka* and *Naṭī* constituted the characters of the *pūrvaraṅga*. Among other elements of *pūrvaraṅga*, items of dance and music entered in complex patterns. However, the extent to which the elements and complications of the *pūrvaraṅga* were actually followed varied with time and place and with the theme of the performance. In this period, the music and dance items seem to have been limited and the prologue appears to have been simplified in practice.

Abhinaya was four-fold—*āṅgika, vāchika, sāttvika* and *āhārya.*[10] The first used bodily gestures and movements, the second speech and intonation, the third expressive manipulations of the body and the fourth costumes, make-up and scenic effects. Speech was the body of drama and *vāchika abhinaya* central. The dialogue or recitation was to be in Sanskrit or Prakrit, and the playwright as well as the actor used to pay due attention to the sounds, grammar, prosody and figures of speech of the language concerned. Equally important was the attention given to *kāku* or voice's modulation. Dramatic speech required not only the realistic rendering of natural speech in all varieties of situations, but the manner in which speech was effected by sickness, old-age, childhood, death-bed, dream, fight, hurry, etc., was also to be carefully represented. When long speech or narrations were to be made they were to be rendered vivid, intelligible and effective by constant attention to gestures, movements and modulations of the voice. Conventional gestures were used to convey that the speech was a soliloquy (*svagata*) or a whisper (*karṇe*) or an aside (*janāntika*) or a secret shared by a character with the audience (*apavāritaka*). For the aside the gesture called the *tripatākā hasta* was used. *Ākāśabhāshita* meant a conversation with a character supposed to be invisibly present.

Again what could or could not be represented directly on the stage was governed by conventions. Thus rage, pleasure, sorrow, curse, marriage, miracles, etc. could be shown as part of the action and experience, but long journeys, killing, fighting, revolution, siege, eating, bathing and love-making were not to be shown. What was not or could not be directly represented, could be intimated by means of *ākāśabhāshita* or the information could be given through the dialogue of secondary characters as an interlude.

Drama is essentially a representation of human experiences and feelings. It denotes the qualitative essence of the play and the peculiar quality of the experience it enables the spectator to achieve. During the Gupta period, it seems that the eight *rasas* propounded by Bharatamuni prevailed. *Śānta* as the ninth *rasa,* or as the ninth *nāṭyarasa,* even if it had emerged, was not taken into consideration. Thus, Kālidāsa speaks of the *ashṭarasāśraya prayoga.*[11] The *Amarakośa* also describes eight *rasas* in its *Nāṭyavarga* section.[12] It is only in the post-Gupta period that the *Vishṇudharmottara Purāṇa* mentions the nine *rasas*. By the 10th-11th centuries it acquired the full-fledged status of *rasa* as Abhinavagupta regularly speaks of nine *rasas*. Secondly, though there were many commentators who spoke on *rasa*, the theory of *rasa* had not reached its fullest development as yet. That was to be only in the post-Gupta period after Ānandavardhana formulated his theory of *dhvani*. The constituents of *rasa* i.e. the terms *vibhāva*, *anubāva* and *vyabhichāri bhāva* still refer to stage representations. It follows, therefore, that the *rasa* they produce must also be a stage effect rather than some aspect of the real life and hence the *rasas* are *nāṭya rasas*. For Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa, the spectators, while viewing a drama, see the real life situation through its enactment and apprehend its emotions in this process. Thus for him, the developed and apprehended *sthāyī-bhāva* is *rasa*. The unique experience of the spectator is compeletely neglected by this view. The account of Śaṅkuka rightly emphasizes the nature of drama as an imaginative spectacle which is apprehended in its own right. However, the imitation-inference approach to the art-object and its perception tends to be realistic and overcognitive. It was only after the theory of *dhvani* was formulated in the 9th century, that the theory of *rasa* was extended to poetry too. The aesthetic experience of *rasa* now meant the imaginative transformation of reality into a spectacle which is lifted out of actual space, time or social relations. This transforms not merely the object of aesthetic experience and the relation of the spectator to it but also the subjectivity and self awareness of the spectator. The experience of *rasa* ends up as a moment of self-consciousness. *Rasa* thus has to be understood as a kind of mediated and transitory self-experience.

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[10] *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Ch.20.

[11] *Vikramorvaśīyam*, 2. 17.

[12] *Amarakośa*, 1.7. 17.

The *Nāṭyaśāstra*[13] describes ten types of dramatic forms—*Ḍima*, *Samavakāra*, *Ihāmṛga*, *Vyāyoga*, *Prahasana*, *Bhāṇa*, *Vīthi*, *Aṅka*, *Nāṭaka* and *Prakaraṇa*. The *Ḍima* and *Samavakāra* were heroic-mythic forms and no actual historical plays of this type are found. The next six are one act and minor dramatic forms. Dramatic forms like *Bhāṇa*, *Vīthi* etc., which were popular among the common folk, were probably enacted in villages, fairs or perhaps by wandering troupes. However, the proper paradigms of theatrical representation were the *Nāṭaka* and *Prakaraṇa*. By this period a number of musical operas and dance dramas with greater affinity to folk than classical (and perhaps for this reason have not been mentioned by Bharata) had become popular. Thus the *Agnipurāṇa*[14] mentions seventeen such forms, besides the ten mentioned in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* giving a list of twenty-seven. The seventeen others are *Troṭaka, Naṭikā, Saṭṭaka, Śilpaka, Karṇa, Durmallikā, Prasthāna, Bhāṇa, Bhaṇi, Goshṭhī, Hallisaka, Kāvya, Śrīgadita, Nāṭyarāsaka, Rāsaka, Ullapyaka* and *Preṅkshaṇa*. The *Troṭaka, Saṭṭaka* and *Nāṭikā* are all of the *Nāṭikā* variety, with light romance, predominance of *Śṛṅgāra rasa*, and much music, and dance. The *Śrīgadita* and *Prasthāna* deal with *Vipralambha Śṛṅgāra*. The *Durmilika* and *Doṁbikā* deal with clandestine love intrigues. *Kāvya* is a composition set in a single *rāga*. *Bhāṇa* has *uddhata* dances and themes of *Nṛsiṁha* and *Hari*. *Goshṭhī, Hallisaka,* and *Rāsaka* all deal with Kṛshṇa and his *rāsa līlās*. All these abound more in music and dance than in *vāchika abhinaya*.

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[13] *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Ch.18.

The themes (*vastu*) of the dramatic performances were religious as well as secular. In the *Purāṇas*, the Yādavas are often described as artists. The plays that the Yādavas staged were *nāṭakas*. The dramatized version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* was by this time an accepted member of the theatrical expertise. The *Harivaṁśa* describes Kṛshṇa organising a party of dancers and actors to enter by ruse into the enemy city. Pradyumna is the hero (*nāyaka*), Sāmba is the clown (*vidūshaka*) and Suvīra Gada is the *naṭa* who accompanies the *Sūtradhāra*. The group is complete with orchestra, musicians, major character actors and minor chorus dancers. They have a large *repertoire* of dance dramas, one based on the *Rāmāyaṇa*, another named *Rambhisāra*, yet another based on Kubera (II.93.59ff.). The *Rāmāyaṇa* has all its characters—Daśaratha, Rāma, Lakshmaṇa etc. on the stage; in the *Rambhisāra*, Sura enacts the role of Rāvaṇa and Manovatī acts as Rambhā; Pradyumna becomes Nalakūbera and Sāmba his *Vidūshaka*. The performance has a clear definite pattern. It begins with the sound of musical instruments, tuned perfectly with the *tantri* i.e. *viṇā*. The *susira*, i.e. the flute, the *muraja* and *aṅka* i.e. the percussion instruments, are followed by vocal music in the *Devagāndhāra*. The composition is *chhalikya*. Pradyumna does rythmic movements to this music before the actual play begins. Soon after another musical instrument sounds. It is only when the *Nāndī* has sounded (II.93.27ff.) that the actual play starts and the characters come on the stage to perform. From the description of the actual performance, it is evident that *nṛtta* and *abhinaya* are clearly distinguished and *laya* and *tāla*, vocal and instrumental music with percussion instruments is an integral part of the visual performance. (II.93). Apart from these religious themes with gods as heroes were the secular themes as *Naṭāka* and *Prakaraṇa*. The former had kings as heroes and the plot centred round the palace, romance, intrigue, politics and pleasure. The *Prakaraṇa* had at its centre the rich Nāgaraka, the courtesan, knaves etc. Kālidāsa was the greatest dramatist of this period. A close perusal of the stage techiques of plays sheds considerable light on the theatrical conventions of the day and show how well the language of gesture was understood by the audience. By the time of Kālidāsa, not only had the *vāchika abhinaya* i.e. the technique of words become more polished and refined, but taste in drama, dance and music had developed and become more critically rigorous and academically exacting. Conventions of *nāṭyadharmī, nṛtta* and *nṛtya* (*āṅgika abhinaya*) found in Kālidāsa hardly ever deviate from the rules of Bharata. Kālidāsa observes that the *Nāṭyaśāstra* i.e. dramaturgy is primarily a practical art (*prayoga pradhāna*) and hence he is the perfect stage craftsman and the professional dramatist rather than merely the poet. In the *Kumārasambhava* (7.91) we have an interesting reference to a theatrical production of *prayoga*. Śiva and Pārvatī witness a drama, complete with different junctures (*sandhi*), styles (*vṛtti*) and *rāgas* set in the appropriate *rasa* and *aṅgahāras* appropriate to the *śṛṅgāra rasa*.

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[14] *Agnipurāṇa*, Ch. 338.

Classical Indian dance has two distinct facets—*nṛtta* and *nṛtya*. *Nṛtta* is pure dance in accordance with rythm and tempo. It is composed of the definite sequences of the combined movements of hand and feet, culminating in some characteristic pose or stance. *Nṛtya* was dance with music. It can also be called *abhinaya*, which is the term popularly used by practising dancers for the aspect of dance. It involved gesticulations, facial expressions and acting. The purpose was the enactment of *rasa* by some narrative theme as lyrical literary compositon.

Āṅgika abhinaya or *nṛtya* relates to the movement of major limbs (*aṅga*) and minor limbs (*upāṅga*), their use for the expression of *rasa* and of dominant (*sthayī bhāva*) and transitory moods (*sañchāri bhāva*). The six *upāṅgas* are eyes (*netra*), brow (*bhrū*), nose (*nāsa*), lips (*adhara*), cheek (*kapola*) and chin (*chibuka*). The six *aṅgas* are head (*śiraḥ*), hands (*hasta*), hips (*kaṭi*) chest (*vakshaḥ*), sides (*pārśva*) and feet (*pāda*). Hand poses or movements are basically of three types. The first is *asaṁyuta hasta* performed by a single hand; the second is *saṁyuta hasta* performed by both the hands; the third is *nṛtta hasta* frequently used in *nṛtta*. *Nṛtta* or pure dance consists of the following elements viz., *nṛttahasta*, *sthāna* or posture, *chāri* or movements, *karaṇas* or coordinated hand-feet movement, sequence of *karaṇas* i.e. *aṅgahāras* and *maṇḍala* i.e. a sequence of *aṅgahāras*.

The dance scenes in Gupta art are doubtlessly classical in nature. The dance scenes of this period are not ones in which there are unidentified unformulated hand and feet poses. Some of these can even be identified with Bharata's *karaṇas* and *chāris*. Motifs of Gupta sculpture which depict gandharvas or flying vidyādharas are important not only as sculpture motifs, but also from the point of view of dance movement. They may not depict dance poses as such, but through their postures of kneeling, extensions and flexions they seem to suggest leaping and flying. In the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the marked feature of the group of *karaṇas* which depicts the gaits of flying creatures may be summed up under the name *vṛśchika*, i.e. one leg is flexed at the knee with the lower leg stretched or upturned. In the flying gandharva, Gwalior (Fig.1) both the legs of the gandharvas are flexed and one knee clearly touches the ground, the knee of the released leg also seems to rest on the ground. In quite a few of the reliefs from the Gupta period depicting flying gandharva there is a forward thrust of the torso suggesting forward movement and extension of one leg or both legs suggesting release. An interesting illustration of the *vṛśchika* leg extension and the *kuñchita karaṇa* is seen in a *Rāmāyaṇa* scene from Deogarh (Fig.2) where Svarūpaṇakhā takes this pose to suggest running away. Another figure of a vidyādhara from Bundelkhand (Fig.3) shows the same pose of the *vṛśchika karaṇa*; but the shift in the positioning of the knee of the flexed leg in front and the prominent *udvāhita* torso seem to transform it into a exuberant figure really moving in the air. There are yet other dance scenes where the dancer is accompanied by the entire orchestra. One such seen can be seen on lintel from Pravaya, Gwalior (Fig.4). The dancer poses amidst drummists and musicians. She here strikes a significant pose. Her feet suggest the *svastika* pose or accord with the *svastika* group of *chāris*. Her right leg is slightly extended out and crossed (hence, the *svastika*), the left is at the thigh level. The left leg is taken back in a *kuñchita* foot. The arms suggest the *karī hasta nṛtta hastas*. The head is bent to the right and so is the waist. The pose seems to suggest the *ardhasvastika karaṇa*. It is characterised by *svastika* feet and *karī hasta*. The scene from Deogarh temple is somewhat different in nature (Fig.5). This is group of five. The main performing artist is in the centre, flanked by two musicians each to the right and left. Her pose seems to suggest *nṛtya* rather than *nṛtta* (as in the Pavaya, Gwalior). At the moment she seems to be enacting out some *abhinaya* piece. Her pose is simple—she stands in the *āyatā sthāna* for the most part, with the right foot in the *samapāda* (or natural position) and the left foot placed slightly obliquely i.e. *trayasra.* The left arm is placed not on the hip, but on the thigh with fingers spread out. The right does not hang down but is placed between her breasts in *alpadma mudrā*. The *āyatā sthāna* is used for first entering the stage. It could be that this scene is a part of the *pūrvaraṅga.* A similar dance scene of four musicians and the dancer at their centre is seen at Deogarh (Fig.6). The dancer shows a distinct *kshipta* or outward bend of the knee, which seems to suggest that this is perhaps a *tāṇḍava* dance movement. In fact this scene is important in so far this is one of the earliest scenes where a distinct *kshipta* position of the knees is observed. It is now one of the basic foot positions of the *Bharatanāṭyam.* In Sarnath on the 16 feet long door-way lintel two fine dance scenes are seen on the upper panel. One is very much like the Deogarh temple scene—a group of five figures, two musicians on each side of a central figure. She is the chief dancer in *āyatā sthāna.* In the next panel, the dancer's arms are possibly the *ardharechita nṛtta hasta*—right arm is *rechita* and left hand *chaturasra.* The feet are cross in *svastika*—one foot is in natural or *sama* position and the other is a *sūchipāda* (Fig.7). Other such dance scenes are seen at Ajanta (Fig.8).

That the principles of *nṛtta* and *nṛtya* laid down by Bharata were well-established is evident also by the literature of the period. Kālidāsa mentions Bharata's dramatic performance in the *Vikramorvaśīyam* (2.17). The *pañchāṅga abhinaya, chārimaṇḍala, maṇḍala, aṅgahāra* and *chaturasraka sthāna* are mentioned in his works.[15] Mālavikā on the stage stands in the *āyatā sthāna.* In the *Raghuvaṁśa* (3.52) when Raghu, equipped with bow and arrow defiantly challenges Indra, Kālidāsa, describes his posture as the *ālīḍha sthāna* (which is what Bharata prescribes for such a situation). Classical dance consisted of two basic dance forms viz., *Tāṇḍava* and *Lāsya. Tāṇḍava* was created by Lord Śiva. It was of the *uddhata* or vigorous style. *Tāṇḍava* was performed during the *pūrvaraṅga* to be staged along with the *devastuti* that was sung and was based on the *vardhamānaka*, a complicated beat-structure of the *gandharva* form of music. *Rechita aṅgahāras* were greatly used in the *Tāṇḍava*. *Lāsya* was the *sukumāra* or gentle form of dance dominated by *śṛṅgāra rasa*. It comprised of *lalita karaṇas* and *aṅgahāras* which were graceful and beautiful such as *talapushpapuṭa* etc.

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[15] *Mālāvikāgnimitram*, Act I; *Raghuvaṁśa*, 4.4; *Kumārasambhava*, 7.91; *Vikramorvaśīyam*, 4.41-42

That these two dance forms had been firmly established in the Gupta period is evident by the literature and art of the period. In the *Mālāvikāgnimitram* (1.4) it is said that "for the sake of this art (*nāṭya*), Śiva caused the left side of his body to become feminine", i.e. divided himself into two. In the conception of Śiva dividing himself into two, the idea of the two categories of dance—*Tāṇḍava* and *Lāsya* is inherent. The *Vikramorvaśīyam* (2.17) refers to the *lalitābhinaya prayoga*. The *Amarakośa* (1.7.10) too, mentions *Tāṇḍava* and *Lāsya* as two distinct styles of dance. The dance scenes in Gupta art seem to have been typified into *Sukumāra* or *Lāsya* on the one hand and *Tāṇḍava* on the other. We find examples of both the types of dancing in the sculptures of this period. This is true specially of the later Gupta period at Ajanta and Ellora where we find the various *Tāṇḍava* poses of Śiva. With the cave temples of Ellora, Elephanta and Ajanta begins a new era in the history of Indian sculpture. In the dance scenes in these temples, the most important feature to be noticed is the emergence of the full-fledged image of the dancing Śiva.

There was yet another dance form, viz. the *Piṇḍibandha*.[16] This seems to be a symbolic dance, originally connected with temple worship. It seems that in course of time the elements of this dance became popular and were incorporated in theatre forms and folk dances. The term *Piṇḍi* is said to represent well-marked emblems (weapons, flags etc.) of various gods. Now, how were the *piṇḍis* to be exhibited in dance? It is said that, each god had his own *piṇḍi* which was to be formed by making the body take the shape of that *karaṇa* or *aṅgahāra* that was able by its name or form to symbolise (by representing the emblem or cosmic symbolism) the deity concerned. For example, the *piṇḍi* of Lord Vishṇu is Tārkshya i.e. Garuḍa. Hence, this is to be shown by forming the *Garuḍaplutaka karaṇa*. The Gaṅgā and Sarpa are indicated by the *Gaṅgāvataraṇa* and *Nāgāsarpita karaṇas*, Vishṇu by *Vishṇukrānta* and *Chakramaṇḍala karaṇas*. Śiva is pleased by the *Nikkuṭaka karaṇa* which shows the body like a trident (*triśūla*) and

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[16] *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Ch.4.

Pārvatī by the *Talapushpapuṭa karaṇa.* This seems to constitute the original phase of the dance possibly used to invoke the gods by temple dancers.

By this period, this dance form seems to have been incorporated both for the theatre and folk and social dancing. As part of the theatre, it was performed during the *pūrvaraṅga* of the play for the worship of the deities during the *raṅga pūjā*. In this form it seems to have retained most of its classical elements as after the placement of the orchestra, the stringed and percussion commence playing. The dancer enters, assumes a proper *sthāna* and renders the *upohana* (i.e. the initial rendering of notes). She sings and enacts out of the first *vastu* or unit (there are four such units) of the composition as also *sūchā abhinaya.* There is a *nṛtta* sequence. She performs the *rechakas* (i.e. rotatory movements of waist, hand and feet), offers *pushpapiṇḍi* (i.e. offering of flowers to the gods), and pays obeisance to them.[17] In the *Mālavikāgnimitram* (Act II) Mālavikā's *chālikya* performance follows a pattern which is similar.

There were four styles of rendering the *piṇḍibandha,* viz. *Piṇḍi, Śṛṅkhalikā, Latābandha* and *Bhedyaka.*[18] *Piṇḍi* is a general term. *Śṛṅkhalā* is said to be a *gulma* or cluster. The name implies a chain formation. It seems that dancers holding hands (a chain formation) perhaps formed a circle, such concentric circles giving the appearance of a closed cluster. *Latābandha* is said to have a *jāla* formation. It seems that dancers with their arms round each other stood in horizontal-vertical rows giving the impression of a net. *Bhedyaka* is the form where the group formation is broken up and dancers perform individual movements. These elements of the *piṇḍibandha* are amply seen in the folk and social dancing.

In the plays of Kālidāsa, specially the *Vikramorvaśīyam* (Act IV), we come across several *Prākṛta* song-cum-dances used in the theatre. *Charchari* was both a song and a dance and was used specially in the dramatic form termed *Troṭaka.* It has strong folk affinities. *Khuraka* was a dance performed to fine cymbals, with the *rāga patamañjarī* sung in fast and medium tempo. *Kuṭilikā, Mallaghaṭi* and *Galitaka* are yet other types of dances. The *Kuṭilikā* is done without song and evidently belongs to the *nṛtta* variety. It seems to be a variety of *Tāṇḍava* dancing as it was performed with the *Ardhamattali karaṇa. Galitaka* uses *abhinaya* and *nṛtya*. In the *Mālavikāgnimitram* (Act II) Mālavikā performs a difficult dance-cum-song composition called the *chalita*. *Chalita* is described by the commentator Kātyāyana as the dance in which the dancer, while acting the part of another, succeeds in expressing his or her own real feelings. The composition and structure of the verse to which she dances is the *chatushpada* composed of four *vastus* or units and is in the medium tempo. Mālavikā appears on the stage with all her limbs in the *saushṭhava* position: a dance performance must begin from this position of poise, complete control and balance. She first renders the *upohana*, then sings and enacts out the piece. The *abhinaya* is done in accordance with the proper *rasa*, which is *śṛṅgāra*. The Parivrājikā or judge uses two technical terms in connection with her performance viz: *śākhā* and *sūchī*. *Śākhā* was a school of dance that used certain stylized arm movements, as seen to this day in some traditions of Bali and Java. *Sūchī* was a technique which conveys and foreshadows through gestures and temperament, the meaning of a sentence before it is sung or recited. This sort of a representation was done mainly through song and dance. In the *Kāmasūtra* (1.3.14.20) the *Chalitaka* is mentioned as one of the 64 arts in which a courtesan had to be trained. The *Harivaṁśa* (89. 68-69; 89. 78-82; 89. 87) also mentions the *chalikya* as a difficult composition and its song includes six *grāma rāgas*. The *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa* (Vol.II, p.425) mentions *chalika* as a variety of the music-dance composition, *nartanaka*. A danseuse sings and renders through gesture the contents of the song.

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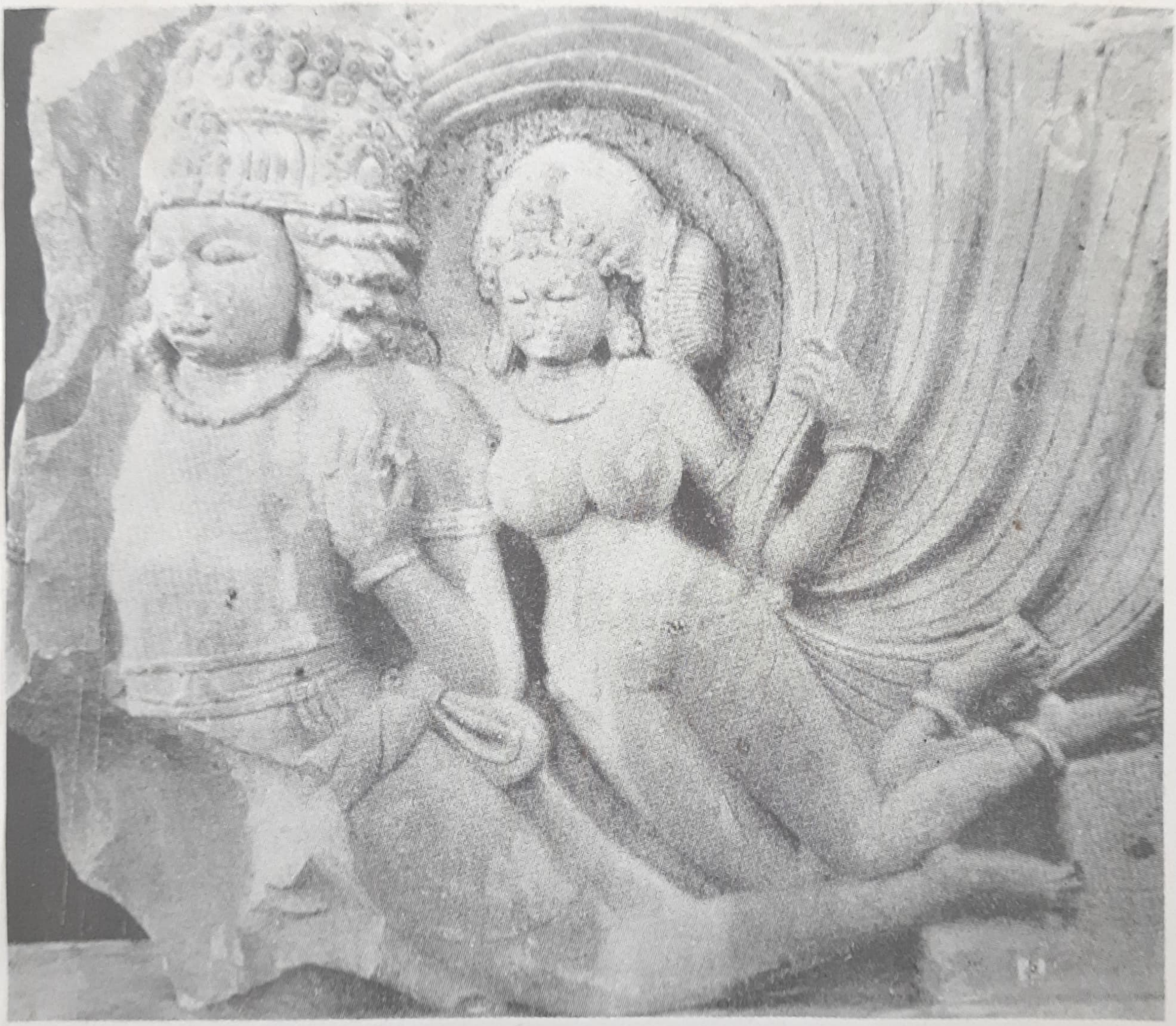
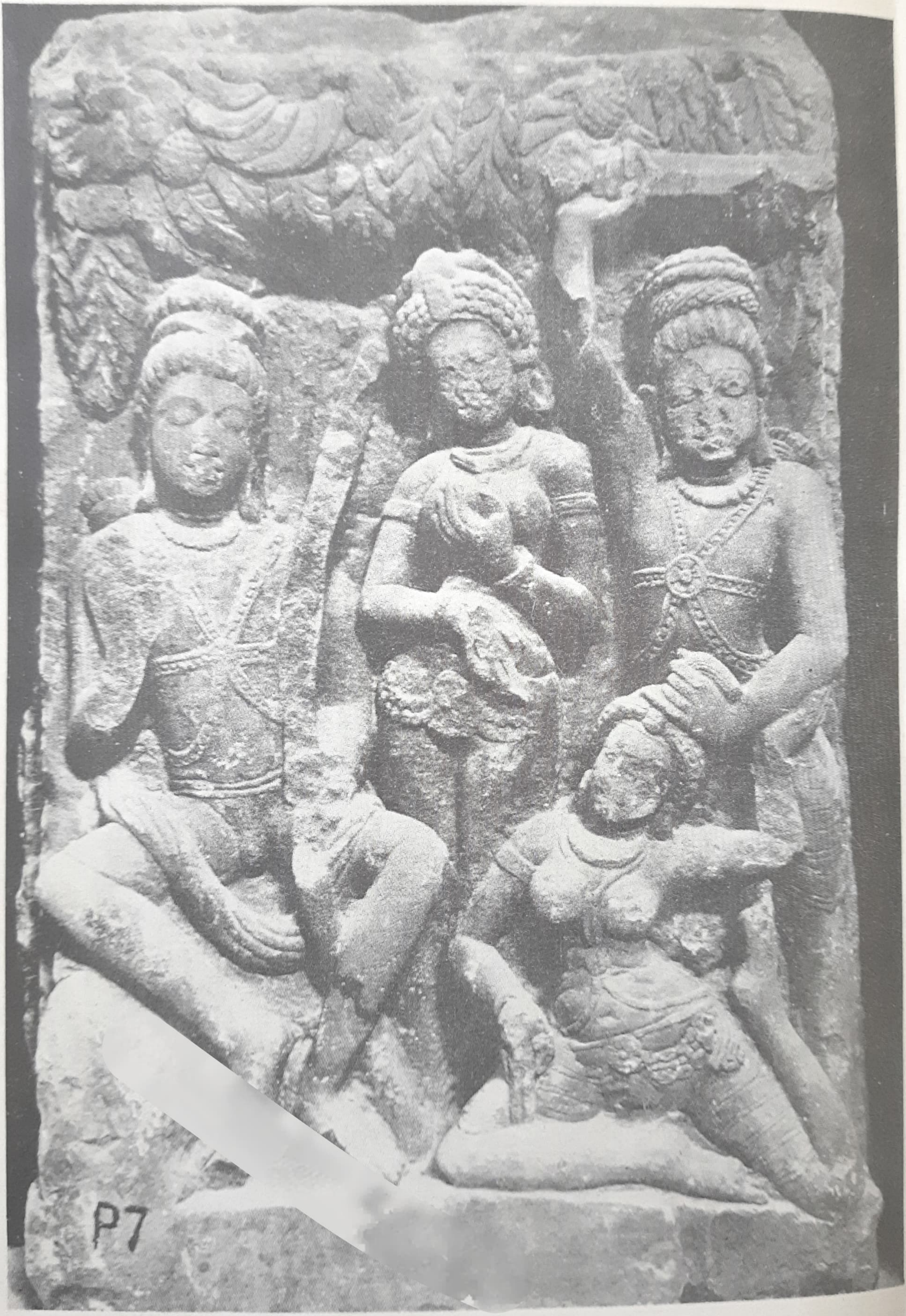
[17] *Ibid.,* 4. 277-86.

[18] *Ibid.,* 4, 293-95.

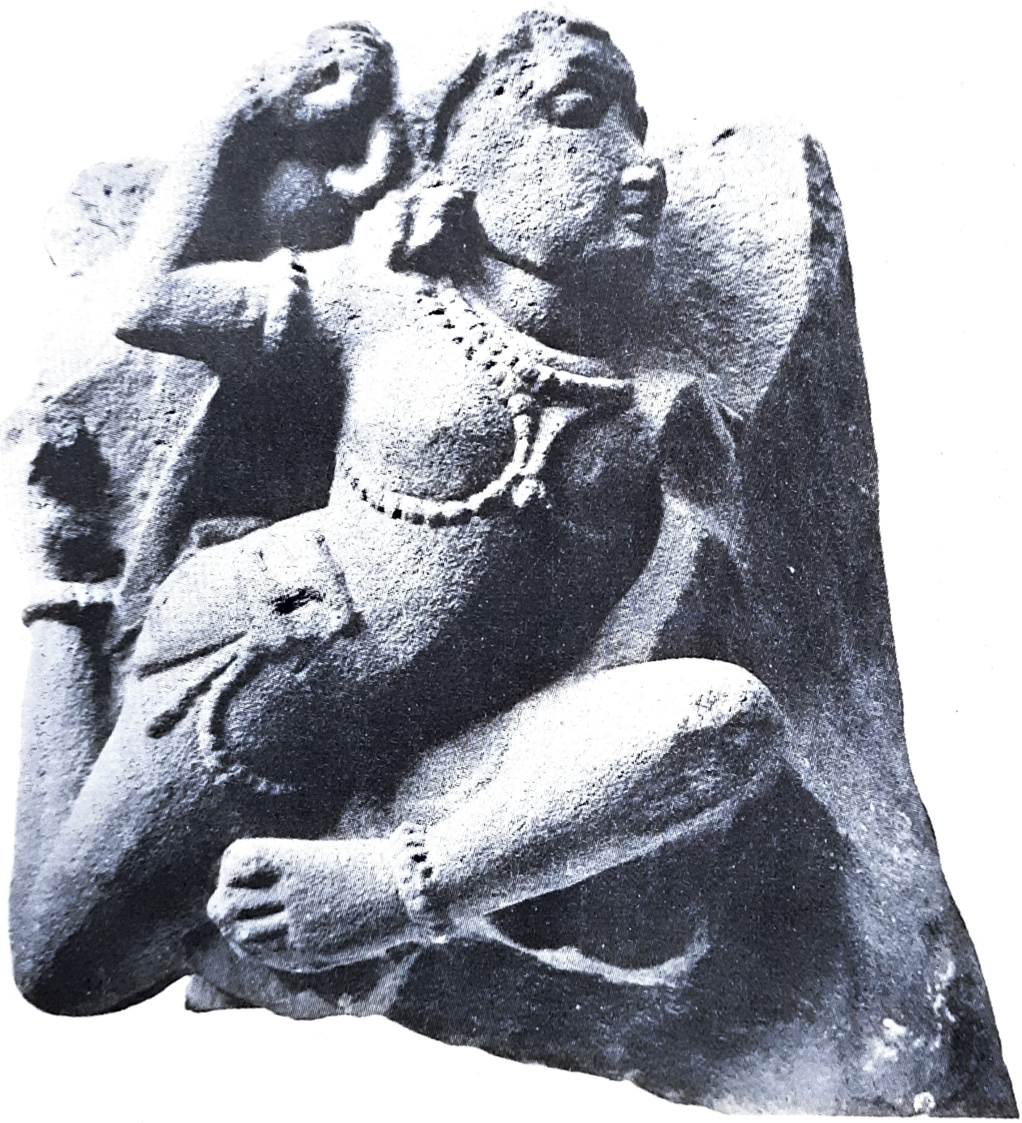
The growth of Vaishṇavism in the Gupta period had its impact on the performing arts. A number of dance-music compositions like *Goshṭhī, Hallisaka, Daṇḍarāsaka* and *Rāsaka* had Nṛsiṁha and Kṛshṇa as their theme. The whole ancient *Nāṭyaśāstra* was born in Śaivism; but by this time it had come to be influenced by the worship of Kṛshṇa and Vishṇu. The *Hallisaka* and *Rāsaka* with its Kṛshṇa-Gopī theme had folk connotations. Both *Hallisaka* and *Rāsaka* relate to Kṛshṇa and the Gopīs. While in the *Hallisaka* there is one *nāyaka* in the centre and several *nāyikās* round him, in *Rāsa* there are as many men as women. Pairs take part in it, for Kṛshṇa multiplied himself and kept company with each of the Gopikās. Both were group dances in circles. In the cave No.4 (named Raṅga Mahal) of the Bagh caves, there is a dance scene in which there is one dancer in the centre and other dancers round him in a circle. Sivaramamurthy has called this a *Hallisaka* folk dance. Besides this was the *Charchari*. This was also called *Nāṭyarāsaka*



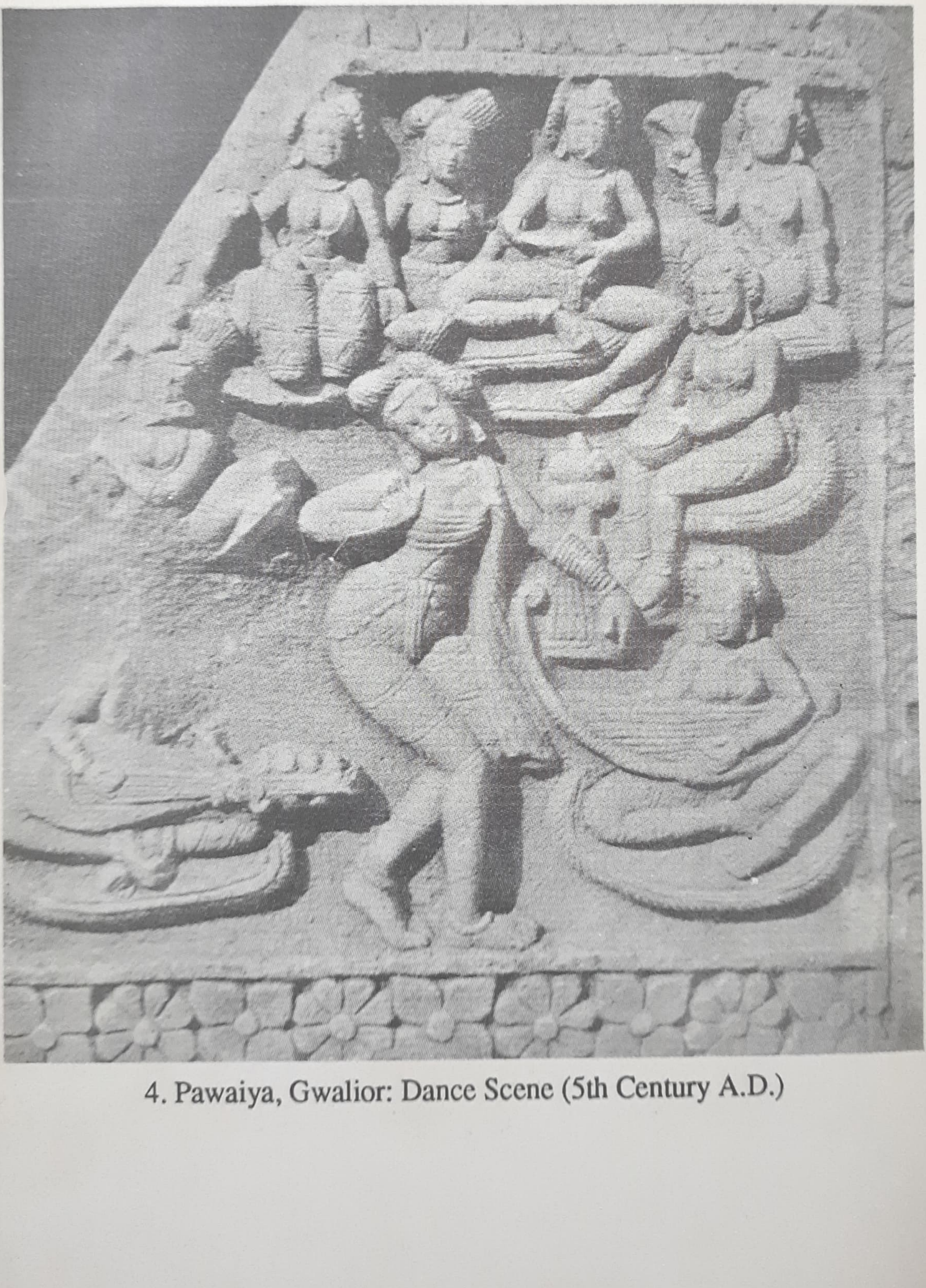
1. Gwalior: Flying Gandharva (5th-6th Century A.D.)



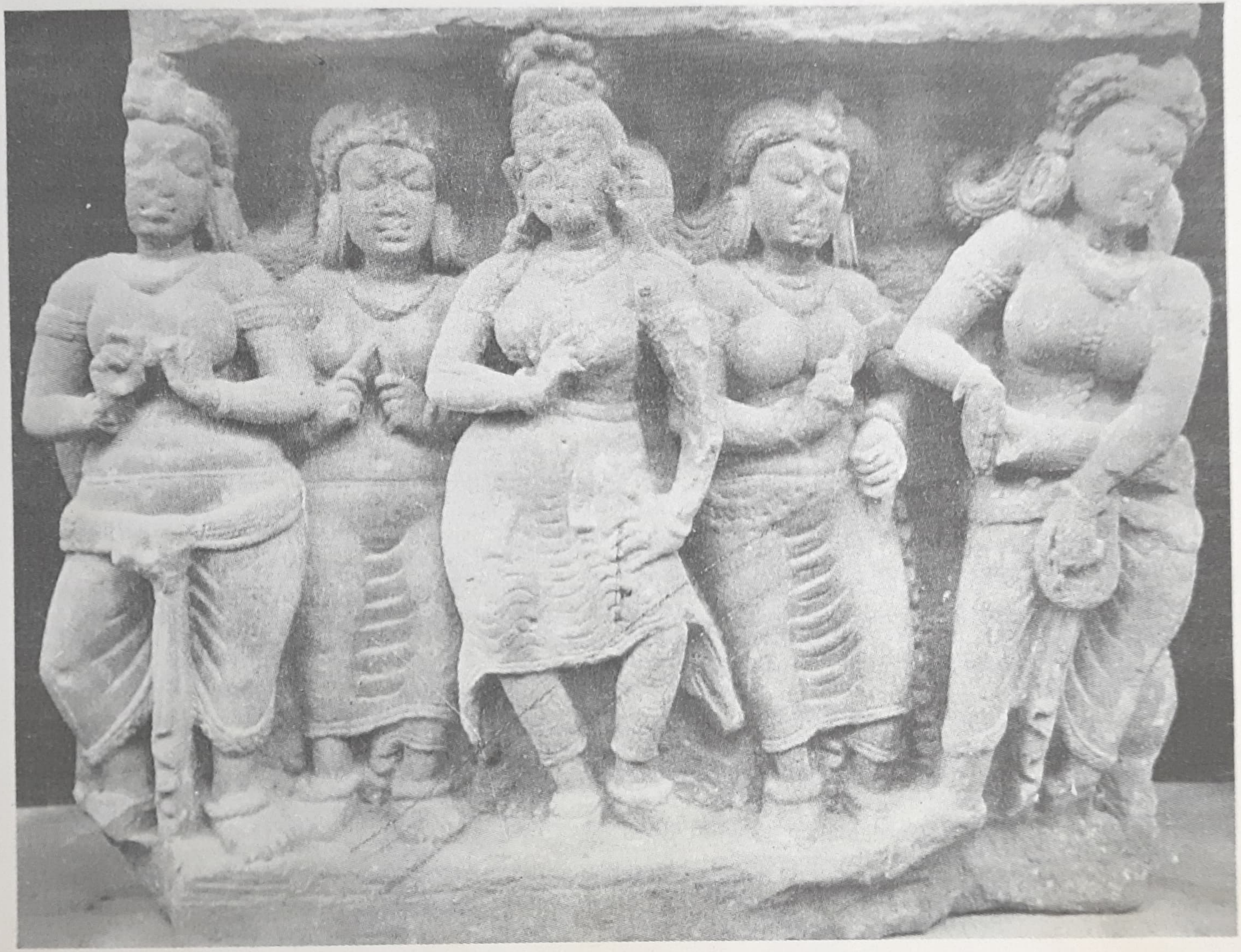
2. Deogarh: Scene from Rāmāyaṇa (5th Century A.D.)



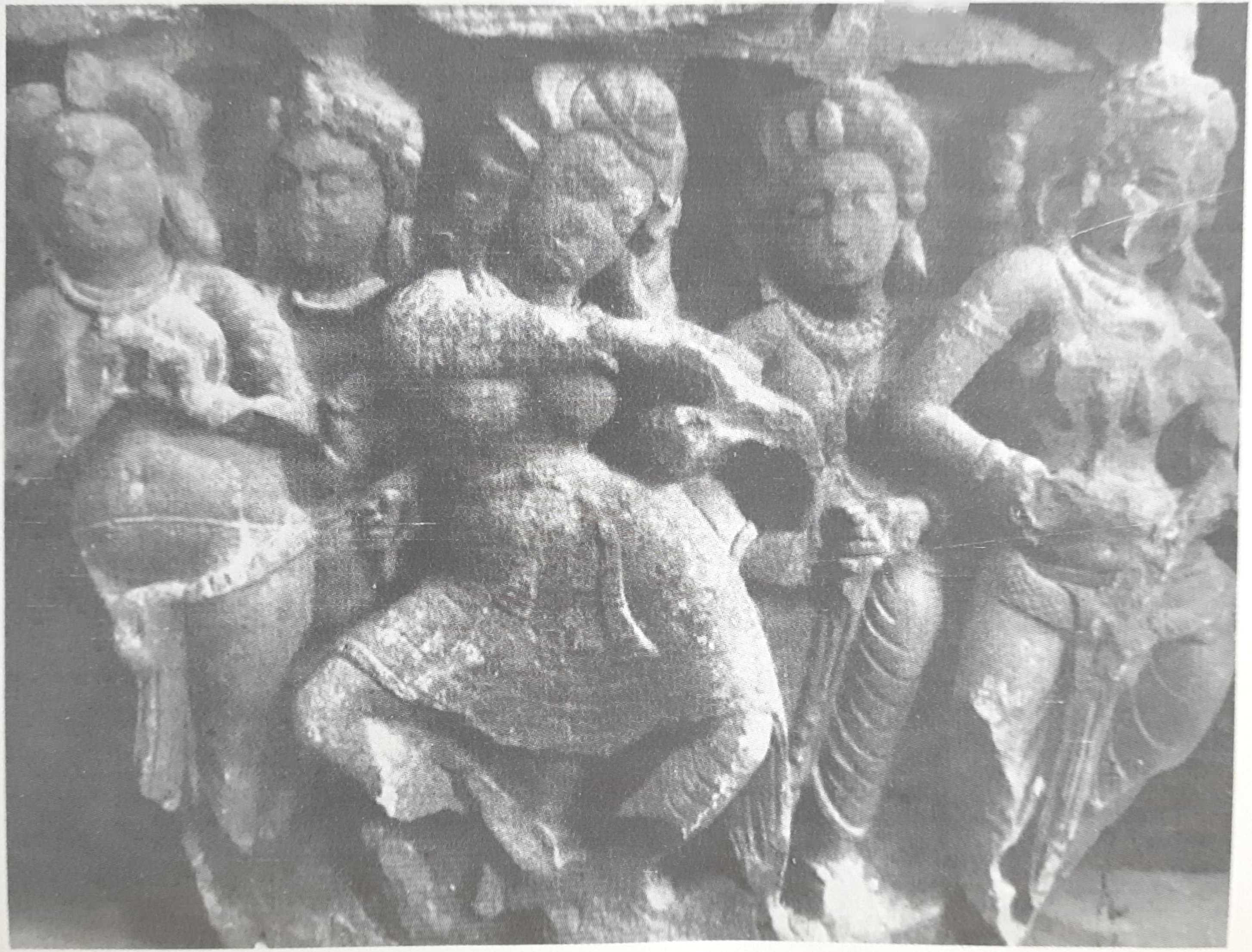
3. Central India: Vidyādhara (5th Century A.D.)



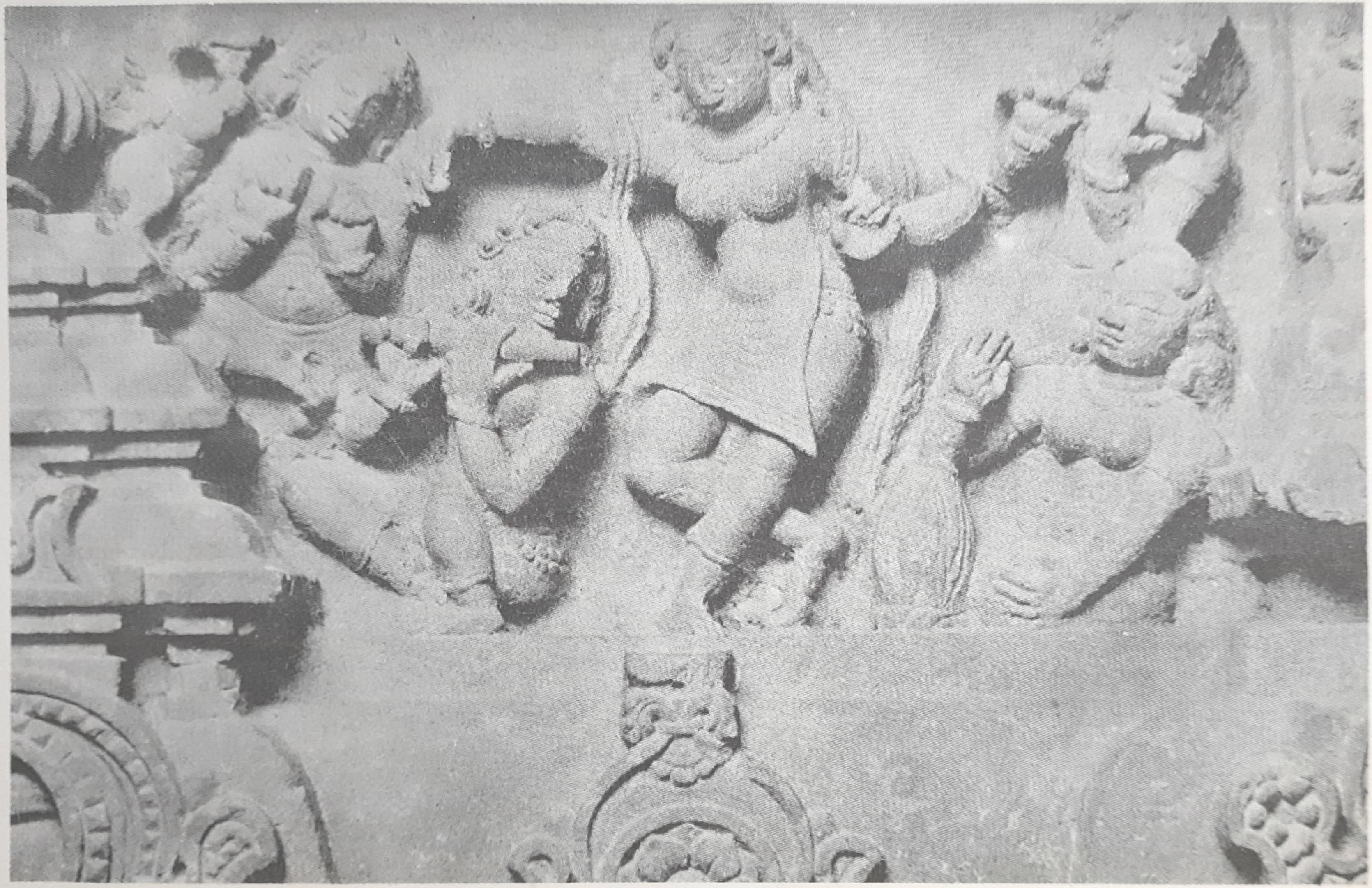
4. Pawaiya, Gwalior: Dance Scene (5th Century A.D.)



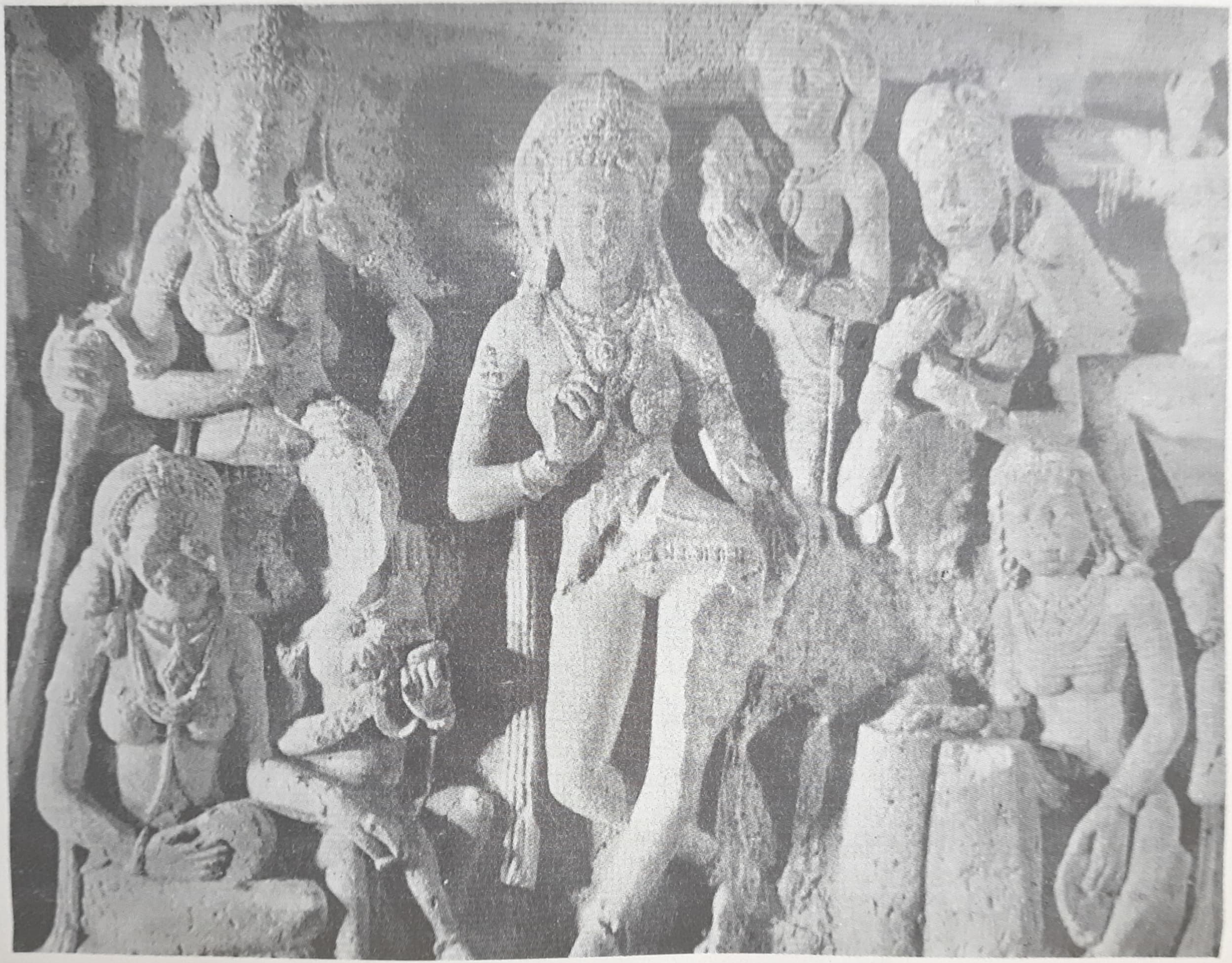
5. Deogarh: Dance Panel (5th Century A.D.)



6. Deogarh: Dance Panel (5th Century A.D.)



7. Sārnāth: Dance Scene on Lintel (5th Century A.D.)



8. Ajantā: Dancer and Musicians (7th Century A.D.)

possibly when used in *nṛttātmaka prabandhas* in the theatre. The *Charchari* was the dance of the spring festival and the *Charchari* song was accompanied by clapping of hand. Yet another was the *Daṇḍarāsaka*, perhaps something like the *Daṇḍarāsaka* of Kathiawar. The *Piṇḍibandha* with its elements of *piṇḍi*, *śṛṅkhalā*, *latābandha* and *bhedyaka* was used in all these dances.

The history of Indian music can be summed up thus: From *Sāman* music of the Vedic period arose *Gāndharva* system of music with its *Jātigāna*. From *Gāndharva* arose the *Dhruvā Gāna* with its melodic structure, the *Grāma rāgas*. By the medieval period the *Dhruvapada* with its *rāga* and *rāginī* was prevalent. With Mohammad Shah Rangila arose the *Khayāl* which is prevalent now. The Gupta period is important for the history of Indian music, as it saw the efflorescence of *Gāna*. The *Nāṭyaśāstra*, though dealing with the theatre, gives only one chapter to *Dhruvāgāna* while it gives five to *Gāndharva* music. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* and *Harivaṁśa* mention only six *grāmarāgas* and the *Vāyu Purāṇa*, which is an early Purāṇa, does not even mention the *Dhruvāgāna*. On the other hand, by the 7th cent. A.D. when Mataṅga's *Bṛhaddeśī* was written, the *Grāmarāga* itself had given rise to various other forms like *Bhāshā*, *Vibhāshā*, *Antarabhāshā* etc. and *Grāmarāgas* were considered almost classical. The *Bṛhaddeśī* makes a two-fold distinction of *gāna* itself into forms which are more regulated (*nibaddha*) and unregulated (*anibaddha*) i.e. still in a variable and fluctuating state. The distinction is on the same lines as was earlier done between *Gāndharva* and *Gāna*. It follows logically that the period from early Gupta to late post-Gupta was important for the history of *Dhruvā Gāna*. This is not to say that the *Gāndharva* system was out of vogue.[19]

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[19] In the *Bṛhadkathāślokasaṅgraha*, XVII.4-6, we come across the following verses:
mayo'ktam Nāradīye' pi nivṛtte kil labhyate/
gāndharvaśabdastattasmādasmākaṁ kāryatāmiti// 4
tato vyāharitastena vīṇāchāryaḥ kharasvaraḥ/
nashṭaśrutisvarajñāno bhūtiko nāma durbhagaḥ// 5
āsichcha mama na dṛshṭvā vikṛtaṁ naravānaram/
alam me Nārdīyena kṛtam gāndharvadattayā// 6
Dr. Agarwala comments thus:

"In XVII. 4-6 is a bitter invective against *Nāradīya* music. Its teacher, a vīṇāchārya is spoken of as of coarse voice (*kharasvara*) ignorant in the knowledge of *śruti* and *svara* (XVII-5) and incapable of distinguishing *nishāda* and *shadja* (XVII.20). It was for this reason that Sānudāsa and Gāndharvadattā turned their face against *Nāradīya* music. The factis that, in the Gupta age the ancient *Nāradīya saṁgīta* was replaced by the new music of *rāgas* and *rāginīs*. This was an important innovation in the history of Indian music and it appears from the statement made here that the people's reaction was all in favour of the

Far from it, it was still very much prevalent and, in fact, seems to be the classical system of music. On the other hand, the *Dhruvā* system of music underwent elaboration, many new derivative forms of *Grāmarāgas* arose and it became more popular as it was influenced by folk and regional factors.

The *Gāndharva* system of music was elaborate, complex and governed by rigid rules. It was ritualistic and its ultimate purpose was *adṛshṭa phala* or transcendental merit. This ritualistic aspect was perhaps the legacy of *Sāman* music. *Gāndharva* consisted of *svara tāla* and *pada* in order of priority.[20] The *Gāndharva* music had seven basic or primary notes. Two subsidiaries, used rarely, were termed *svara sādhāraṇa* i.e. slightly sharpened *nishāda* and *gāndhāra*. There were two musical scales—the *madhyama grāma* and *gāndhāra grāma*, three octaves, 49 *tāna*, *varṇa* and *alaṁkāra* for ornamentation of notes. The various melodic structures of the *Gāndharva* singing were the *jātis* analogous to the present day *rāgas*. The distinctive feature of *Gāndharva* music was its complex and elaborate *tāla* patterns.[21] Even the basic unit for measuring time consisted of not less than five short *mātrās* termed *kalā*. The *Gāndharva* beats were formed by specific hand and finger movements according to prescription. From the point of view of marking *tāla* such elaborate gestures were quite unnecessary. It is clear that ritualistic significance was attached to this. It is interesting to note that *Sāman* chanting shows no evidence of *tāla*. *Pada* or the words of the song had a subsidiary role in *Gāndharva*. *Pada* served only as a prop for *svara* and *tāla*. Indeed, the musician would often distort the words by stretching or splitting them and by singing only a particular syllable. This tendency was probably inherited from *Sāman* singing. The *Sāman* singers did not attach much importance to the intelligibility of the hymns but distorted the words freely. In present day classical music, too, the exegencies of *svara* and *tāla* often cause the words to be quite distorted.

From *Gāndharva* was born *Gāna*. Generally speaking the word *gāna* means 'song'; but the reference here is to a special type of sing-

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new musical modes in preference to the *Nāradīya saṁgīta*, which has been made here the object of ridicule."

—*Bṛhatkathāślokasaṁgraha—A Study*, p.323.
V.S. Agrawala's Sans. text, edited by P.K. Agrawala.

[20] *Nāṭyaśāstra*, 28. 8-9.

[21] *Ibid.*, Ch.31.

ing—the singing of *Dhruvās* (songs connected with the theatre) or *Dhruvā gāna.*[22] This was the music played in the background during the staging of ancient dramas.Though born from the *Gāndharva* system of music, the *Gāna* system was quite different in nature and purpose. *Gāndharva* was essentially the musicians' music with transcendental merit as its ultimate purpose. The purpose of *Gāna* was *rakti* or pleasure—the pleasure it gave to the audience watching the drama. Freed from traditional and ritualistic restrictions it developed into a great variety. *Gāna* included forms like *grāmarāga* and its derivates, *bhāshā, vibhāshā, antarabhāshā,* etc. *Grāmarāgas* were born through mixing and combining elements taken from two or more *jātis* in various ways and were hence called hybrid or *saṁkara* forms. These forms when moulded to the theatrical context were called *Gāna. Bhāshā* etc. were derived from *grāmarāgas*. In *Gāna* much permutation and combination was permissible as regards both *svara* and *tāla*. Various possible musical scales and chromatic tonal formations were permitted; even quarter tones or notes with a single *śruti* interval were used in *Gāna*. Compared to *Gāndharva, Gāna* was, thus, distinctly more popular and freer.

Five basic types of *Dhruvās* have been enumerated by Bharata, viz: *prāveśikī, ākshepikī, prāsādikī, antarā* and *naishkrāmikī.*[23] The *Dhruvās* suggested acts and moods of different characters in a play; and this was suggested by the contents of the song, as well as their metre, language, tempo and *tāla*. Particular kinds of *dhruvās* were to be rendered on particular junctures and occasions on stage. Themes of various *rasas* at the entrance of characters on stage were termed *prāveśikī dhruvās*. The exit of characters is indicated through *naishkrāmikī dhruvā*. If there was a sudden intervention in the prevailing *rasa* of the scene, then the *ākshepikī dhruvā* was sung. The prevailing sentiment or *rasa* which had been disturbed by sudden intervention is once again purified and established by the *prāsādikī dhruvā*. It helped to restore the absorbed interest of the spectator, producing pleasure and was hence known as *prāsādikī*. This was invariably after the *prāveśikī* and *ākshepikī dhruvās*. The *antarā dhruvā* was sung to cover up a fault or mistake by the actor during the actual enacting of a play. It seems that sometimes, when the actor was disturbed due to exertion or some confusion and committed a mistake, then the *antarā dhruvā* was sung to give time to the actor to regain his composure, adjust his costume etc.

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[22] *Ibid.*, Ch.32.

[23] *Ibid.*, 32. 317-23; also 6.30.

Dhruvās were to be used appropriately taking into consideration the theme, place, time, season, character-type, mood, etc.

Act IV of the *Vikramorvaśīyam* is very important for *dhruvāgāna* as it gives several *prākṛta* love songs that were popular in the theatre of the times. The *prāveśikī dhruvās* are used at the entrance of Chitralekhā and Sahjanyā and thereafter when the king enters. The *Ākshepikī dhruvā* is also sung at both these junctures—in the first instance because the prevailing *śṛṅgāra rasa* of the play is disturbed by Chitralekhā's tragic lamentations that Urvaśī has turned into a creeper as a result of Bharata Muni's curse. The other instance is when the king enters in a distracted state. The actors have to move about on the stage in gaits and steps that are in harmony with their mental moods. This, swiftness or slowness of their gaits is *laya*. This *laya* is of various kinds, *dvipadikā, khaṇḍadhārā, charchari* etc. *Dvipadī* as the name of a song refers to the nature of the composition as well as its *laya* or time-measure. In Act IV of the *Vikramorvaśīyam*, the *dvipadī* song with its particular metre is given as the movement for *parikramaṇa*, moving round to another part of the stage and wheeling to see around. Rāghavabhaṭṭa says in his comment on the Naṭī Prakrit verse in the *Prastāvanā* of the *Śākuntalam* that the verse on the summer season sung by the Naṭī is a *Dvipadī* in that *laya*. The *khaṇḍadhārā laya* seems to be connected with the exit song as it was invariably used at the exit of characters.

The development of the *Gāna* system of music was assisted not only by the classical *Gāndharva* music, but it had folk connections too. Folk music served as the popular matrix of the more developed forms of music and even in its classical form gave it a diversity of local colour. Folk music was a constant element in folk culture forming a perennial dimension of the festive and ritual round of social life. With the efflorescence of *Gāna* and its musical elaboration, a difference came to be perceived between the classical and folk dimensions of music. This was labelled as the distinction between *Mārga* and *Deśī*. Defining *Deśī* music Mataṅga says "that music which is sung by women, children, cowherds and kings (or in other words, by the general populace) out of spontaneous inclination and desire, in the regions where these people dwell (*svadeśe*) is termed *deśī*."[24] Thus, the *Rāsaka* and *Hallisaka* may be described as the cowherd's dance-song. Then, there were the songs sung on different festivals and social occasions. In the Vedic Mahāvrata ceremony, maidens bearing pitchers did a circular dance, the foot movment of which was in concordance with the system of songs known as *gāthās*. Such folk songs are mentioned by name in the *Śrauta sūtras*[25] as *Hillikā, Himbinī, Hastāvarā, Samvatsargāthā, Jhillukā* etc. The pitcher dance-song was popular all through ancient India. The *Harshacharita* mentions a similar dance, performed by the ladies of the court with pitchers on their heads. They carry their pitchers round the village singing and dancing. The auspicious significance of pitchers is recognised from very early times and continues to be accepted to this day.[26] *Charchari* was the song of the spring festival. The *Raghuvaṁśa* (3.19) mentions the *maṅgalanṛtya* and *pramodanṛtya* at the birth of the princess. These folk dance-songs were sung and danced at social occasions like births, marriages etc.

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[24] *Ābālakalagopālaiḥ kshitipālairnijechchhayā/*
Gīyate sānurāgeṇa svadeśe deśiruchyate//
—*Bṛhaddeśī*, 13.

Musical instruments were classified into four basic groups—*tāta* (cordophones), *sushira* (aerophones), *avanaddha* (membranophones) and *ghana* (idiophones).[27] The *vīṇā* occupied the chief place among *tāta*. The *vīṇās* of Bharata's time were the *chitrā* and the *vipañchī*. The *vīṇās* popular in the Gupta age were the *vallakī* and the *parivādinī*.[28] The *vallakī* was similar to the *vipañchī* and had nine strings. The *parivādinī* had seven strings. Gupta sculpture shows both the harp-shaped and the lute-shaped *vīṇās*. The *vīṇā* could be played either with the fingers or with the plectrum.[29] The *Bṛhadkathāślokasaṅgraha* (27.143) refers to the *kachchhapākāra* or tortoise-shaped *vīṇās*. It also refers to a kind of *goshṭhī* or gathering called *vīṇā goshṭhī*.[30] The *Amarakośa* (Nāṭyavarga, 7.4) says that "*vaṁśādikaṁ sushiram*", i.e. the flute was the chief *sushira* instrument. The flutes of Bharata's time were made of bamboo. Those of the Gupta period, too, in fact, right up to the 7th century A.D. were of bamboo. Abhinavagupta, who flourished in the 10th century A.D. says "Mataṅga muni etc. used flutes made of bamboo to please Śiva in devotion. Hence it is known as *vaṁśa*."[31] This shows that right till Mataṅga's time (probably about 7th cent., A.D.) flutes were invariably made of bamboo. By Abhinava's time it seems that the flute were made not only of bamboo but other materials too. Abhinava says: "Thus it has been said that since it was originally created in bamboo it is known as *vaṁśa*. The *vaṁśa* are also made of *khadira*, silver, bronze and gold".[32] By Śāraṅgadeva's time flutes were made even out of ivory, sandal-wood etc.[33] Kālidāsa invariably refers to the *kīchaka vaṁśa* or flutes of bamboo.[34] The *Bṛhadkathāśloka saṅgraha* (III.33) refers to the *karkara veṇu*. This seems to have been a kind of musical instrument formed of seven pieces of bamboo (*veṇu*) to produce different notes like that of the lute (*karkarī*) and was, therefore, called *karkara veṇu* more or less like a syrinx or panpipe. Both the *avanaddha* and *ghana* instruments are seen in the Gupta art and literature. The former are membranophonic instruments or skin vibrators, in which the skin waves are due to the vibrations of a stretched skin or membrance when struck. The latter are idiophonic instruments or self- vibrators i.e. instruments of solid substance, which owing to their elastic nature have a sonority of their own, which is emitted in waves when struck. The primary *avanaddha vādya* was the *mṛdaṅga*. The *Amarakośa* (1.7.5) mentions three varieties of *mṛdaṅga* viz: *āliṅgya, ūrdhvaka* and *āṅkiya*. These three varieties of *mṛdaṅga*, namely *āliṅgya, āṅkika* and *ūrdhvaka* had the shapes of *gopuchchha* (like a cow's tail), *hārītikī* (like myrobalan) and *yava* (like a barley grain) respectively.[35] From Gupta sculptures (e.g. Figs. 4 and 7) it is evident that the *ūrdhvaka mṛdaṅga* was quite popular. This meant two vertical *mṛdaṅgas*, standing side by side, with one face resting on the ground and the upper ones beaten with the hand. They seem to be the precussors of our modern *tablās*. The *āṅkīya mṛdaṅga*, too, is seen in Gupta art (Fig.4, 5). It was placed on the lap. The *āliṅgyaka mṛdaṅga* is clearly illustrated in the Bagh caves (e.g. the Hallisaka scene). It was hugged to the body by the left arm and beaten by the right hand. It was probably hung from the shoulder by a strap so as to keep it in place. Some other instruments are mentioned in the *Amarakośa* (1.7.5-6; 1.7.8) viz. *muraja, bheri, dundubhī, paṭaha, ḍhakkā, ḍamaru, maḍḍu, ḍiṇḍima, jharjhara, mardala, paṇava,* etc.[36] The *muraja* is referred to as early as the *Jātakas*, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The *muraja* may be defined as a kind of drum or tabor. From the description of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*,[37] it seems that the *muraja* was kept upright and beaten, perhaps with a stick. Śārṅgadeva[38] describes the *dundubhī* as being created of mango wood. It had a large body, emitting a loud sound like the thundering of a cloud. Its belly was of *kāṅsya* (bell-metal), the face was covered with leather and it was without the surrounding ring or *valaya*. It was struck with a *koṇa* or plectrum of hardened leather. It was bound by leather straps on all sides. It was used on the auspicious occasions of victory etc., during festivals and in the temples. The body of the *bheri* was of copper. The *bheri* and *paṭaha* were kettledrums. The *ḍhakkā*[39] was a drum with two faces of 13 fingers each, the left struck with the hand and the right with a striker. The *ḍamaru* is a smaller hour-glass shaped drum. The *maḍḍu*, it seems, was the same as Śārṅgadeva's *maḍḍika*.[40] This was placed on the right knee and played with the right hand. The *diṇḍima* may perhaps have been like the present *ḍugḍugī*. The *jharjhara* was perhaps the same as *jhallarī*. Śārṅgadeva says that this was an *avanaddha vādya* hung round the neck. It was held in the left hand and played with the right hand.[41] According to Abhinavagupta[42] *jhallarī* meant cymbals of bell-metal, perhaps something like the modern *jhānja*. The *mardala* and *paṇava* were both membranophonic drums. The latter probably fitted with strings (*tantribhiḥ yuktaḥ*) which gave the sound of *taṅkāra*. The *Raghuvaṁśa* (16.64) mentions the *varimṛdaṅgavādyam*. Bell-metal cymbals, i.e. *kāṅsya-tāla* were the important idiophonic or *ghana* instruments. These cymbals invariably accompanied *Gāndharva* music. They gave a single monotonous sound and were important for marking time. *Avanaddha* instruments were popular with *Gāna* music, as they were able to produce a variety of sounds or *bols*.

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[25] *Lāṭyāyana-śrauta-sūtra*, 4.3.17-23; cf. *Kātyāyana-śrauta-sūtra*, 13.3.24; cf. *Taittirīya saṁhitā*, 7.5.10.

[26] Pitchers are a dominant element in the *Varshāmaṅgala* dances in Bengal and the *kajri* dances in Uttar Pradesh.

[27] *Nāṭyaśāstra*, 28. 1-2; *Amarakośa*, 1.7. 3-5.

[28] *Vīṇā tu vallakī/*
Vipañchi sā tu tantribhiḥ saptabhiḥ parivādinī//
—*Amarakośa*, 1.7.3.

References to *vallakī* by Kālidāsa are thus—*Raghuvaṁśa*, 8.41; 19.13; *Ṛtusaṁhāra*, 1.8; *Raghuvaṁśa*, 8.35 refers to the *parivādinī vīṇā*.

[29] *Chalayantiṁ kvachitkāñchidvipañchimāñchitaṅgulim/*
Kvachitkoṇaparāmarśaśiñjānaparivādinim//
—*Bṛhatkathāślokasaṁgraḥ*, 10.66.

[30] *Ibid.*, 24.25.

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[31] *Vaṁśātodyamiti pūrvaṁ bhagvānmaheśvarā rādhanasādhanaṁ mataṅgamuniprabhṛtibhir veṇunirmitaṁ tato vaṁśa iti prasiddham.*

—*Abhinavabhāratī* ad *Nāṭyaśāstra*, 30.1.

[32] *Vaṁśe sṛshṭā yadā pūrvaṁ vaṁśasaṁjñā tu vaiṇavī/*
vaṁśāstu tu khadirā raupyāḥ kāṁsyajā va sakāñchanāḥ//

—*L.c.*

[33] *Saṅgītaratnākara*, 6.424-25.

[34] *Kumārasambhava*, 1.8;*Raghuvaṁśa*, 4.73; 19.35; *Meghadūta* (*Pūrva*), 59.

[35] *Nāṭyaśāstra*, (Gaekwad Oriental Series edition), 34.254-55. From n.35. All references to the *Nāṭyaśāstra* are of the GOS ed.

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[36] *Prahatamurajaḥ*, *Meghadūta* (*Uttara*), 1. *Ibid.*, (*Pūrva*), 59; *Murajasvanāḥ*, *Kumārasaṁbhava*, 6.40; *paṭupaṭahadhvani*, *Raghuvṁśa*, 9.71; *mardala* is referred to in *Ṛtusaṁhāra*, 2.4; 1.2.

[37] *Murajastūrdhvakaraṇādātodyaṁ todanādapi.*

—*Nāṭyaśāstra*, 34.286.

Abhinava explains '*Urdhavakaraṇamunnatam*' '*ātodyaṁ todanāt*'—*Abhinavabhāratī* on *Nāṭyaśāstra*, 34.286.

[38] *Saṅgītaratnākara*, 6.1145-47.

[39] *Ibid.*, 6.1095-96.

[40] *Ibid.*, 6.1120-25; see figs. 5 and 6.

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[41] *Ibid.*, 6.1137-38.

[42] '*jhallari kāṅsyatālam*'.

—*Abhinavabhāratī* on *Nāṭyaśāstra*, 34.12.

22

The Temple-Śikhara in the Pre-Gupta and Gupta Period Records

P.K. Agrawala

With respect to the origins of Hindu temple the most problematic and controversial portion of the building is its śikhara. As is now well known, we have the specimens of Brāhmaṇical sanctuaries surviving at present only from the early Gupta period onwards. Archaeological remains of the temple architecture in pre-Gupta times are no more extant and the early Gupta shrines, that too are preserved in a very limited number, are in themselves of a very simple architectural design having moderate dimensions and indeed a flat-topped roofing with no traces of a high superstructure, that is generally considered to be a hallmark of Indian temple. However, it is with the second group of Gupta temples that a modest beginning of the temple spire is witnessed both in stone and brick masonry. Thus there can be no doubt that the unassuming masonry shrine as it appears to emerge architecturally from the fourth century onwards is of a comparatively recent origin.

Although literary references to Brāhmaṇical temples or holy abodes for deities are not lacking in early textual documents, it is not possible for us now to exactly know and ascertain what their architectural forms were. It seems that there were only primitive types of shaded altars or pavilions made of non-permanent materials such as wood, bamboo, thatch or mud as were presumably their residential and other buildings. Bricks and stones were in use but their architectural employment was apparently limited to the construction of raised platforms or daises in case of prevalent holy-steads and ritual altars which carried images or symbols in rather unassuming architectural provisions. If there were any specific building types they were presumably built entirely in ephemeral materials.

On the other hand, we have from the Maurya period onwards a continuous architectural tradition, mostly in service of the Buddhistic and Jaina faiths in the beginning, which is represented by the extensive remains of colossal pillars, stūpas, railings, rock-cut caves etc. of a very high order. Thus it seems strange that for building their sacred establishments various Brāhmaṇical creeds did not favour so early the use of stone on a similar scale though stone images of their gods were made and worshipped at least from the Maurya-Śuṅga period.

An idea of very early temple types can be derived fairly well, besides literary gleanings, from the interesting representations available on certain early coins and monumental reliefs. As may be guessed from several deity-symbols seen of the punch-marked coinage (c.800 B.C.-c.200 B.C.), uninscribed cast coins and local and tribal-republican currency, it was generally on a raised platform encircled by a railing that the symbol of a deity was installed either in the open or under a tree, shed or parasol. This tradition has no doubt continued as such in Hinduism throughout up to our own times. Yet we have several rare examples in which a wooden building-type with high roofing occurs as enshrining the symbol or image.

On a punch-marked coin from the Bodhinayaknoor hoard, we see a four-pillared *maṇḍapa* with domical roof topped by a taurine.[1] Similarly, in the Bharhut, Bodhgayā and early Amarāvatī relief-carvings there are several portrayals showing a timber building with either vaulted, arched or domical superstructure and enshrining a votive symbol placed on a dais. At times the spire shows a formation of several tiers or storeyes.[2]

On two coin-types of the Mitra rulers of c.2nd-1st cent. B.C., we find an arched building showing within it a standing deity-image installed on a railed platform.[3] Also several depictions of a chaitya-shrine, i.e. shrine with the stūpa-symbol, occur in early reliefs of the Śuṅga-Sātavāhana-Kushāṇa periods that show circular, apsidal or square buildings with domical or wagon-vaulted roofing.[4]

The most significant is the portrayal of a pillared maṇḍapa with two- or three- storeyed domical roof of timber construction. This occurs on an Audumbara coin-type assigned to the early first century A.D.[5] On a fragmentary terracotta plaque of the first century B.C. from Kosam,[6] the partially retained depiction shows a wooden mansion of several storeyes. The top-most storey is of apsidal design supported on pillars with *gajapṛshhākṛti* saddle-roof and a highly decorated arched frontage. On an early Kushāṇa Mathurā relief, now in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, we see a temple type with a standing worshipper on either side. It is of octagonal plan, of which three sides are visible in the frontally conceived depiction. The sides were enclosed by a lattice of rail-construction and surmounted by an ogee arch; the front is open as showing the altar enshrined inside. The tiered roofing above is shown vertically compressed and covered by an octagonal dome.[7]

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[1] For details and illustrations see my *Gupta Temple Architecture*, Varanasi, 1968, p. 7, text fig.8.

[2] *Ibid.*, text figs.11-12.

[3] *Ibid.*, text figs.14-20.

[4] *Ibid.*, Pl.III, b.

[5] *Ibid.*, text fig.9.

[6] Agrawala, P.K., *Gupta Temple Architecture*, 2nd (revised and enlarged) edn. Varanasi, 1981, Pl.10, pp.158-59.

There are some more Mathurā reliefs of the first-second century A.D. in which the portrayed temple type could be suspected to represent a partially or entirely masonry construction. One Mathurā architrave in the Boston Museum shows the worship of select Buddhist symbols that were then prevalent among votaries of the Buddha as symbolising his presence. One of them is a temple building, square in plan and with storeyed superstructure.[8] As Coomaraswamy described it, "Above the main cella projects a railed gallery, within which rises the upper part of the temple, consisting of two storeyes, each provided with a small window, and crowned by a four-angled dome." This may be a wooden building but it appears more likely that it is partially a masonry construction though closely imitating wooden prototypes.

Coomaraswamy drew attention to another depiction of a Buddhist temple with multi-storeyed towered superstructure, in which case also each storey is marked by a railed gallery while the top-most element of roofing is an octagonal domical form.[9] Almost similar multi-storeyed tower is seen depicted on a recently discovered pedestal of a Kushāṇa Buddha-image,[10] now in the collection of the Aligarh University Museum and published by R.C. Gaur and U.P.Shah. A structural temple, square in plan, with several tiered superstructure occurs on a fragmentary relief which has a seated Buddha shown below.[11] On the basis of this representation some specific conclusions were drawn by Coomaraswamy who saw in it a masonry type of "a *śikhara*-temple." Referring to it he observed,[12] "What may be regarded as a prototype of the early towers in which the reduplication of the main structure is still quite apparent, may be studied in a Kuṣāṇa railing pillar, J 24 in the Mathura Museum."

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[7] *Ibid.*, Pl.12, p.159.

[8] *Ibid.*, Pl.13.

[9] *Ibid.*, Pl.14, text fig.24. (Cf. Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, reprint New York 1965, fig.69A).

[10] *Gupta Temple Architecture*, 2nd edn., text fig. 15.

[11] *Ibid.*, Pl.15, p.159.

Of some specific interest here is the depiction of a temple of the thatched hut-type with a standing Buddha figure installed inside which occurs on a Gandhāra relief of the 3rd-4th cent., now in the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde.[13] It shows a two-storeyed domical shape crowned by a long finial.

But, unique of its kind is the terracotta model of a shrine found at Nevasa, belonging stylistically to the 2nd century A.D. It shows an arched open frontage with pillars supporting a flat-panel ceiling. There are two Yakshī or Śālabhañjikā females flanking this entrance and the building is placed on a raised terrace encircled by a prominent railing. The superstructure shows a saddle-type *gajapṛshṭhākṛti* design, presumably of wooden construction.[14]

By far the most significant masonry type of a Buddhist temple enshrining a seated Buddha image occurs in the carving on the drum of a miniature stone stūpa showing a frieze of Buddha's eight life-scenes.[15] This antiquity is No.N2 in the Mathura Museum and can be stylistically placed not later than the third-fourth cent. A.D. as its carving style imbibes certain Kushāṇa-Gandhāra influences. No doubt, it precedes the date of hitherto known any of the Gupta Śikhara-temples. Remarkable is the stepped out arrangement of the superstructure with its semi-circular top-ridge and inward sloping contour of true curvilinear description.

On the basis of this outstanding evidence it seems reasonable to presume that a structural shrine with a high-rising typical curvilinear spire was already in existence by the beginning of the Gupta period. But this could not have been much favoured owing to certain technical problems which the architects were yet to master fully in their handling of the masonry construction. Further, it may be conceded that a high roofing for a shrine was in vogue for last several centuries and perhaps also during the pre-Christian time. But all that was in timber construction of which medium the Indian architects were unrivalled masters ever since the long-drawn out ages before the extant historical monuments.

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[12] Coomaraswamy, *op.cit.*, p.80.

[13] *Gupta Temple Architecture*, 2nd edn., p.159, Pl.17.

[14] *Ibid.*, Pl.9, p.158.

[15] *Ibid.*, Pl.16, p.159.

The most pertinent question posed on its own accord is why those architects who built the huge stūpas and railings did not raise stone shrines with high superstructure? The answer lies apparently in the fact of architectural difficulties and technical limitations which the ancient builders faced in their attempts of spanning open space in masonry work. They could erect solid stūpas of any dimensions by piling up layers upon layers of bricks or blocks of any kind. But walled buildings of bigger size was an impossiblity for them and no such constructions with a hollow room inside could be successfully made then in masonry except for the pillared pavilions or maṇḍapas.

However, the rock-cut architecture had already been in practice by the Maurya period but that was somehow not favoured with respect to excavating temple places. The reason is obvious for the essential requisite of a hill for this excavation did not suit temple culture. The temple worship was primarily concerned with the people at large and all village and city settlements were normally in the plains. As was the case, rock-cut caves were favoured only by certain world-renouncing monastic religions who could have their isolated residence and a sort of congregational chaitya-ghara in the hilly tracts away from the world. But the temple was an altogether different concept and thus we do not have much evidence of rock-cut shrines employed in service of Brāhmaṇical and folk religions.

Coming to the masonry buildings, it seems presumable on the basis of a Bodhgayā relief that a flat-roofed shrine had already come to be made by the first century B.C.[16] It shows its three walls on sides and at the back as made of dressed stone blocks with the front left open for entrance. The whole construction is topped by a flat stone slab making the roof. And it is in all fitness of things that this masonry type continued successfully for several centuries and we find it still followed approvingly in the early Gupta temple-types. However, all other attempts for a stone building to have a high superstructure must have utterly failed before the evolution of practically sound techniques that could serve successfully to have the building intact from cracking down in face of the extra load of a high supersturcture, if any. We see the resourceful Gupta architect making his advances in the direction of raising the height of the sanctum in a very careful planning. Many of his initial attempts must have also been met with practical failure and several temples having high and heavy roofing must have cracked down within a few years of their consecration and several others needed to be attended by wholesale repairs. Thus, we find many early inscriptions commonly recording the donation of essential funds to a temple establishment for providing its repairs and restorations (using almost proverbially the phrase *khaṇḍa-phuṭṭa-saṁskāra-karaṇārtha-*).

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[16] *Ibid.*, Pls.18-19 (1st edn., 1968, Pl. III, c.).

We have some outstanding epigraphical evidence which tends to shed some welcome light in its own way on the evolution of temple-*śikhara* during the early Gupta period itself. It may be remarked that the earliest references to a temple-śikhara in Gupta epigraphs—in fact, in the entire corpus of the extant Indian inscriptions—are first encountered in the stone records of the Malwa region, specially the province of western Malwa, which was the homeland of ever-belligerent Malwa feudatories in the Gupta empire. Dated within a period of less than fifteen years during the rule of Kumāragupta I, there are three inscriptions from Tumain (Guna district), Gaṅgadhāra (Jhalawad district) and Mandasor (Mandasor district) which record the installation of Brāhmaṇical fanes at the particular sites and make pointed mention of the high and noble character of the monuments and their śikhara as lofty and broad as the peak of a hill or of the Kailāsa mountain.[17]

In certain other, more of less contemporary, Gupta records we have the consecration of other religious structures and shrines, mentioned, as also the perpetual donations to them but that is mostly without any allusion to their lofty nature or high superstructure (e.g. inscriptions from Udaigiri, Bilsad, Karamadanda, Baigram, Jagadishpur, etc.). This apparent contrast unequivocally indicates the regional fascination, enthusiasm and architectural nuances of the builders and patrons in western Malwa (cf. the use of the Malwa era in this region in place of the imperial Gupta reckoning). These factors appear to have been responsible for their *true* attempts towards evolving a distinctive structural spire rising high like their tribal-republican afflatus over the otherwise modest flat-top of the prevalent temple-type.

According to verse 21 of the Gaṅgadhāra inscription of A.D. 423, the temple building dedicated to the god Vishṇu resembled the high peak of the Kailāśa mountain (*kailāśa-tuṅga-śikhara-pratima-*).[18] Line 6 of the Tumain inscription of 435-36 A.D. mentions the building of a temple as lofty as a mountain peak (*giri-śṛṅga-tuṅgam*).[19] Likewise, verse 30 of the Mandasor inscription belonging to its part first of A.D. 436, describes a Sun temple having its śikhara as broad and towering as a hill-peak (*vistīrṇa-tuṅga-śikharaṁ śikhariprakāśam*)[20]

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[17] See below.

[18] Fleet, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* (*CII*), III, p.62.

It is unfortunate that all the three śikhara-temples documented by these epigraphs are no more surviving and how their śikharas looked like can hardly be known. It can only be guessed that they were not much different in design than the extant Deogarh example. However, the Mandasor inscription when carefully studied provides an instructive piece of evidence regarding the architectural growth during the third and fourth quarters of the 5th century. The inscription has in fact two parts, the first one being earlier belongs to A.D. 436 and informs of the initial consecration of a śikhara-temple of the Sun god while the second part is dated in A.D. 473 and concerns with the event of its wholesale renovation. Verse 36 of the inscription says, "during the long duration under several other rulers, the portion of the temple had got dilapidated." Verse 38 is of unusual significance as it refers to the renovated state of this temple building consequent to its due repairs accomplished just after thirty-six years of the initial consecration: *atyunnatam avadātaṁ nabhaḥspṛśanniva manoharaiśśikharaiḥ*,[21] i.e. (which is now) quite lofty and elegant, as it were touching the sky with its fascinating *śikharas*.

Now, we have here a clear mention of several fascinating *śikaras* that had made the very high (*atyunnatam*) and elegant (*avadātam*) temple building appear to the poetic fancy as touching the sky. Do we not have in this verse of A.D. 473 an outstanding piece of evidence documenting a rapid growth in temple architecture within a short period of time between A.D. 436 and 473 which had brought about the particular modification or elaboration in the architectural design of the spire? We have no doubt this description of the renovated temple as having śikharas, not only one but several as the expression is in plural, makes specific reference to the subsidiary replica-śikharas, which embellished the body of the high superstructure as demarcating its several rising stages or *bhūmis* all round. Such replica-śikharas are properly called *uraḥśṛṅga*, *mañjarī*, or *chhātiya-śṛṅga* in Vāstu terminology.

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[19] Sircar, D.C., *Select Inscriptions*, 2nd edn., Calcutta, 1965, p.299; Agrawala, P.K., *Imperial Gupta Epigraphs*, Varanasi, 1983, p.40.

[20] *Ibid.*, pp.85-86; Sircar, *op.cit.*, p.305.

[21] *Ibid.*, p.306; *Gupta Temple Architecture*, 1981, p.137.

The above mentioned passages also indicate that architecturally the construction was not so perfect as to even survive intact the duration of three or four decades. This should have been the major cause of their utter destruction within a few generations of their establishment despite repeated repairs, and to-day all traces of them have altogether disappeared except for the stone inscriptions discussed here.

It is, however, a unique coincidence that we have the earliest known temple with a śikhara surviving to-day at Deogarh in the territory contiguous to Eastern Malwa.[22] It was set up, according to an undated inscription, by Bhāgavata Govinda who seems to be no other than the prince Govindagupta of the imperial Gupta family as he was the governor of the ever-belligerent Malwa province under his brother Kumāragupta I (c.414-55 A.D.), and even after him. In the light of the above-cited epigraphs it seems further justified to assume that this Govindagupta[23] caused the temple of Deogarh to be built in the new and distinctive śikhara style which was experimented primarily by the Malwa builders with some success.

A few other epigraphical passages are also informative in the present context and shed some more light on the concept of temple-śikhara and its several examples existing within the fifth century A.D. The concluding lines of the Junagadh rock-inscription (dated to A.D. 457-58) of the time of Skandagupta (455-67 A.D.) enumerating the temple of Vishṇu by his Saurashtra governor Chakrapālita at Girnar[24] have survived only in a damaged condition and the particular temple itself is also lost architecturally. Whatever words that are extant of its verses 46 and 47 are however, enough to indicate that the poet here had specially alluded to the height of the temple by bringing it in comparison to the nearby peak of the Girnar mountain (verse 46)[25] and by stating perhaps the poetic fancy of its causing obstruction in the aerial path of birds (owing evidently to its towering śikhara, verse 47).

We have the interesting evidence for the existence of śikhara temples during the last decade of the fifth century afforded by the Chhoti Sadri (Udayapur district, Rajasthan) inscription of Mahārāja Gaurī, a feudatory of the Daśapura (mod. Mandasor) ruler Ādityavardhana.[26] The find place of the record is near the Neemuch railwaystation of the Mandasor district. In its verse 11, it is stated with reference to Yaśogupta, the father of Gaurī, that he adorned the earth with many *prāsādas* as high as mountains (*prāsādair adri-tuṅgaiḥ*). The next verse describes a temple (*prāsāda*) which was consecrated by Gaurī himself in 491 A.D. (V.S.547) for the grace of the goddess. The building is styled to be marvellous to look at and as high as the peak or peaks of the chief of the mountains: *śailendra-śṛṅgonnataḥ prāsādodbhuta-dariśanaḥ* (*darśanaḥ*).

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[22] *Ibid.*, pp.53-58.

[23] *Ibid.*, p.58, 137.

[24] Sircar, *op.cit.*, p.316.

[25] *Imperial Gupta Epigraphs*, p.62. Note the restoration suggested in stanza 46.

Thus, there is no reason to doubt the fact that by the sixth century the style of śikhara temple had spread far and wide to various parts of northern India and such temple buildings were erected at different centres by enthusiastic religious benefactors according to their resources and liking. Among the dated records, we have for the middle of the sixth century the Haraha inscription (Barabanki district, U.P.) commemorating the renovation of an old ruined temple of Śiva by the Maukhari prince Sūryavarman. The temple was thus rendered in A.D. 553-54 to appear quite high (*samunnatam*) as per wishes of the prince: *svechchhā-samunnatam akāri lalāma bhūmeḥ* (verse 20).[27]

Connected on the mother's side with this Maukhari ruler most probably was the South Kosala king Mahāśivagupta Bālārjuna of the Pāṇḍava family. As we know from a stone inscription of his time from the Lakshmaṇa Temple portico ruins at Sirpur,[28] his queen-mother Vāsaṭā, who was a daughter of the prince Sūryavarman of the illustrious Varman dynasty of Magadha, consecrated this temple of Vishṇu as a memorial to her deceased husband. This dedicatory record of the extant Lakshmaṇa Temple is although undated but can be safely placed somewhere in the first half of the seventh century A.D. and it is remarkable to find in its verse 21 a graphic statement made on the elevational aspect of the temple. By a pleasant and so easy use of the figure of speech *śleṣa* (double entendre)[29] the poet has likened the temple with the world itself; in the case of the temple superstructure the meaning presented so befittingly of several technical phrases may be put in English as follows:

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[26] *Ep. Ind.*, Vol.XXX, pp.120ff.

[27] Sircar, *op.cit.*, p.389.

[28] *Ep. Ind.*, Vol.XI, pp.184-201.

[29] See Agrawala, P.K., 'The Temple-Śikhara as Mentioned in the Gupta Period Records,' *Abhinandana-Bhāratī*: *Prof. K.K. Handiqui Felicitation Volume*, Gauhati, 1982, pp.135-36; *Gupta Temple Architecture*, 1981, pp.83, 139.

"The temple (*prāsāda-*) which is made wonder-evoking (*adbhuta-*) by the diversity (*vaichitryāt*) of the low and high (*uchchāvachaiḥ*) works (*karmaṇām*) (of art)—with the frameworks of the temple body (*vapuḥ-pañjaraiḥ*) stationed at its manifold stages (*bahuvidhāvasthaiḥ*),—representing the entire multitude of creatures beginning with divinities, is expressed as it were under a great cover to be explicitly (a representative of) the world itself, which is wonderful (similarly) from the diversity of high and low deeds of the entire group of divine and other creatures passing through diverse stages of existence ; etc..." How appropriately the several details of the architectural embellishment of the contemporary temple-superstructure are visualised here in excellent poetic images can be fully assessed without difficulty by a student of temple architecture. The verse in original (*EI*, XI, p.192) runs as follows:

divyādeḥ sakalasya jantu-nivahasyochchāvachaiḥ karmaṇāṁ
vaichitrayād ayam adbhuto bahuvidhāvasthair vapuḥpañjaraiḥ/

(yaḥ) prāsāda vra(bṛ)hachchhalena kathitaḥ saṁsāra eva sphuṭaḥ paśyantastad imaṁ manaḥ kuruta bho pāpeshu mā bhūmipāḥ//*[30]

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[30] By way of double entendre both the temple and the world are qualified with the same set of adjectives. Earlier scholars translating or commenting on the verse somehow missed their proper import in the temple context. See, for example, Hira Lal, *Ep. Ind.*, XI, p.196; Kramrisch, S., *The Hindu Temple*, Calcutta, 1946, p.357; Jain, Balchandra, *Mahanta Ghāsīdāsa Smāraka Saṁgrahālaya, Sūchipatra*, Part VI; *Utkīrṇa-lekha*, Raipur, 1961, p.43.

Economic Rights of Women in the Gupta Age

Savita Vishnoi

I

The period from the third to the sixth century A.D., broadly the period of the hegemony of the Guptas, is usually described as the Classical Age of Indian history. The earliest of the law-givers of this period is Yājñavalkya. He is considered next only to Manu in importance and antiquity. J. Jolly assigns him a date in the fourth century A.D.,[1] while P.V. Kane places him between first century B.C. and 300 A.D.[2] It should be remembered that though Manu's authority is regarded as unquestionable by all the Hindus, they are really governed by the laws contained in the *Yājñavalkya Smṛti* which was composed when, according to tradition, sages approached Yājñavalkya in Mithilā and requested him to impart them the *Dharma* of *Varṇāśrama* and other institutions.[3]

Though with regard to contents and style Yājñavalkya generally follows Manu, his work is more systematic than that of Manu. He divides his *Smṛti* into three sections and puts all topics at their proper place and avoids repetition. He deals with almost all subjects found in Manu, but his treatment is always more concise. *Kāṇḍa* II of his *Smṛti* deals with *vyavahāra* where topics like partition,[4] time of partition,[5] wife's share in it,[6] partition after father's death,[7] joint ownership of father and son (including twelve kinds of sons),[8] succession to a sonless man,[9] and husband's power over wife's *strīdhana*,[10] have been discussed. Yājñavalkya, for the first time, determined the order according to which the heirs should succeed to the property of the deceased. It seems that in the time of Yājñavalkya, joint-family was the rule and every effort was made to keep up this tradition and hold the family members together. However, the public opinion was turning against it and the sage could not ignore the emergence of this new trend in the society. He was obliged to yield to the force of the current and write about the rules of succession.

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[1] Jolly, J., *Hindu Law and Customs*, Calcutta, 1928.

[2] Kane, P.V., *History of Dharmaśāstra*, Vol.I, p.447.

[3] *Yāj.*, I. 1.

[4] *Ibid.*, II. 116.

[5] *Ibid.*, II. 110.

[6] *Ibid.*, II. 117.

[7] *Ibid.*, II. 119.

[8] *Ibid.*, II. 124.

[9] *Ibid.*, II. 138, 139.

[10] *Ibid.*, II. 148, 151.

The *Vishṇu Smṛti* is not the meterical version of what are called *Vishṇu Sūtras*. The original *Vishṇu Dharma Sūtra* has been placed about 300 B.C. to 100 A.D. and the present inflated text between 400 to 600 A.D.[11] Jolly also observes that the present *Vishṇu Smṛti* cannot be placed earlier than the third or fourth centuries A.D. Kane agrees with him.Vishṇu described the state of society of the period which is the subject-matter of this paper. Manu ,Yājñavalkya and Nārada never envisaged the minute subdivision of castes, which divided the Hindu society of this period. Some of these were defined with great precision by Vishṇu. From his *Sūtras* he appears to have been a resident of some village in Bengal or Oudh. He proposed to collect all the available information concerning Hindu castes and tribes.

The determination of the systematic order of succession was the work of Vishṇu.[12] He worked out and fully developed the plan which was tentatively given by Yājñavalkya. It was Vishṇu who assigned proper place to the daughter's son.[13] However, the daughter's son is not mentioned in the *Vishṇu Smṛti* itself, but he is cited in its commentaries. It is laid down by Vishṇu that he who is heir to the estate is the giver of the funeral cake.[14]

There is some confusion about the exact date of Parāśara. He appears to have been a historical person. The sage Parāśara is famous as the father of Vyāsa, the author of the *Mbh.*, but it is difficult to ascertain if there was any relationship between this Parāśara and the Parāśara who wrote the *Parāśara Smṛti*. The extant *Parāśara Smṛti* relates that when Vyāsa was questioned about *Dharma* by some sages, he did not answer himself but rather took them to his father Parāśara who resolved their curiosity through this *Smṛti*. As an author of a *Smṛti*, Parāśara is mentioned by Yājñavalkya, thus pointing to his earlier existence. But, the *Parāśara Smṛti* too mentions Yājñavalkya. Hence, his anteriority or posteriority to Yājñavalkya cannot be decided on the basis of this evidence. Kauṭilya has also mentioned Parāśara but only in the context of *rājadharma* whereas the extant *Smṛti* confines itself only to *āchāra* and *prāyaśchitta*. It may be presumed that there existed an earliar version of the *Parāśars Smṛti* which included also topics other than what we find in its extant version. However, a definite date to the extant *Parāśara Smṛti* is difficult to be assigned. In the *Mitāksharā*, Aparārka, *Smṛti Chandrikā* and other later works, Parāśara is quoted very frequently and mostly from the extant *Smṛti.*

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[11] L.Renon on *Vishṇu* in *Journal Asiatique*, 1961, pp.163-72.

[12] *Vishṇu.*, XVII. 4-16.

[13] *Mit.*, II. 2. 6.

[14] *Vishṇu.*, XV. 40.

The extant work of Parāśara is called *Bṛhat-Parāśara-Saṁhitā*. It is divided into twelve Chapters of 592 verses. In the fourth Chapter the *Bṛhat-Parāśara* deals with the forms of marriage, duties of wives, *jātakarma* and other rites, gifts, proper person to receive gifts, etc. Parāśara declares that the maiden daughter would take the heritage of the father who dies leaving no male issue, or if there is no such daughter, a married one shall inherit.[15]

Nārada is clearly a later writer. As he has not been mentioned by Yājñavalkya and Parāśara, it is reasonable to infer that the *Nārada Smṛti* is later in origin than those of Manu, Yājñavalkya and Parāśara.[16] It is difficult to say anything as to the home of Nārada. Jolly's belief that he hailed from Nepal has been dismissed by Kane as 'pure guess work'. It is estimated that he flourished about 400 A.D. He professes merely to be a compiler of the traditional law handed down from the time of Manu. In the Introduction of his *Smṛti* he states that he is presenting only an abridgement of the larger work of Manu. Notwithstanding this assertion, Nārada is not confined to being merely the redactor of Manu's work, for he differs in several essential matters from the latter. He is categorical and emphatic in his statement that custom is powerful and it overrides any text of the sacred law.

Nārada is renowned for the advanced and progressive views expressed by him on a number of matters. A feature of his *Smṛti* is that it deals solely with law (*vyavahāra*). Some of the topics of law dealt with by Nārada are inheritance,[17] ownership, property, gifts[18] and partnership.[19] He also deals *inter alia* with the age of majority and share of widows[20] and unmarried sisters.[21]

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[15] Quoted in *Dāyabhāga*, XI. 2.4.

[16] Cf. J.Jolly (translation of *Nārada Smṛti*, Preface, p.xvii-xviii) who says that 'Nārada is probably later than Yājñavalkya'. P.V.Kane (*HDS*, I, p.203) states that 'Nārada flourished at the same time or somewhat later than Yājñavalkya'.

Jolly assigns Bṛhaspati to the 6th or 7th century A.D.[22] while Kane states that he must have lived between 200-400 A.D.[23] His *Smṛti* is available in parts only. He agrees more with Manu than with Nārada. But in certain respects, such as the rights of women, he shows much advance over Nārada.

Bṛhaspati, following the footsteps of Yājñavalkya and Vishṇu, developed the law of inheritance to a considerable extent. He expresses his admiration for *Manu Smṛti* and writes that no code may be approved which contradicts the sense of any law promulgated by Manu. According to him whosoever might be the heir, it is his first duty to perform those ceremonies which benefit the deceased spiritually and 'half of the collected wealth' should be set apart for this purpose.[24]

Kātyāyana is accepted as one of the exponents of *Dharma* by Śāṅkha-Likhita. He appears to have taken Nārada and Bṛhaspati as his models in the treatment of subjects like *vyavahāra*. He was a follower of Bṛhaspati from whom he repeatedly quotes to support his own views. However, the fragments of his work do not give the rules of succession in detail. He writes that father and son have equal rights in grand-father's property,[25] but in the self-acquired property of the father the son has got no right.[26] Kātyāyana has some reluctance in admitting the son of a daughter as an heir. The daughter has natural affection and sympathy for her father's family. It is, therefore, fair that she should have a share of the paternal property. We see that the family associations were cherished and legislators were not easily persuaded to introduce foreign elements into the family which were difficult to be amalgamated with the corporate body.[27] Bṛhaspati was probably the first to carefully define several kinds of *strīdhana*.[28]

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[17] *Nārada*., XIII. 12. 13.

[18] *Ibid*., IV.

[19] *Ibid*., III.

[20] *Ibid*., XIII. 26.

[21] *Ibid*., XIII. 27.

[22] Jolly, J., *SBE*, XXXIII, p.276.

[23] Kane, P.V., *HDS*, I, p.488.

[24] *Bṛhaspati*., XXV. 60.

[25] Kātyāyana, cited in *Smṛti Chandrikā*, p.649.

[26] There is no reference to *vyavahāra* in the Bengal version which is Jīvānanda's edition.

Vyāsa is nearer to our times. The *Vyāsa Smṛti* is a collection from different commentators in four Chapters and contains about 250 verses. Vyāsa, the author of the *Smṛti*, was different from the writer of the *Mbh*. The holy city of Vārāṇasī was the place where, we are told, Vyāsa delivered his lectures on laws to an audience of learned men who solicited to learn from him the nature of social duties and relations of different sections towards each other. His views in most respects agree with those of Nārada, Kātyāyana and Bṛhaspati.

Vyāsa seems to represent a middle stage in the evolution of the rights of widow to succeed her deceased husband. He gives the father and sons equal shares in ancestral property[29] and allows partition even against the wishes of the father.[30] From these characteristics of Vyāsa, Kane has concluded that he flourished about the same time as Yājñavalkya and Bṛhaspati i.e. between the second and the fifth centuries A.D.[31]

Hārīta is quoted by Āpastamba and Vasishṭha. We have no means for verifying the quotations. But the extracts from Hārīta, which we find in the *Mitāksharā*, *Dāyabhāga* and other later digests, are all in aphoristic style and lead us to the conclusion that they must have formed part of a larger work written originally in the form of *sūtras*. Judged by the internal evidence also, we find that the ideas expressed in them belong to a society older than Manu's. About the division of the property. Hārīta states that after the death of the father wealth should be divided among sons equally.[32]

Some of the *Purāṇas* were written in this period. Hazra has pointed out that "there were two main stages in the development of Purāṇic *Smṛti* materials." In the first stage, between the 3rd and 5th centuries A.D., the *Purāṇas* deal only with those topics of Hindu rites and customs which formed the subject-matter of early *Smṛtis*, like those of Manu and Yājñavalkya.

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[27] Kātyāyana, cited in *Mitākshar*ā, II. 1.6. and other commentaries.

[28] Colebrooke's *Digest*, Book V, p.462.

[29] Vyāsa, quoted by Aparārka, p.728.

[30] There is no discussion about inheritance in the text extant in Bengal.

[31] Kane, *HDS*, I, p.532.

[32] Hārīta, quoted in *Smṛti Chandrikā*, p.614.

II

In the Gupta age wife's right over her husband's property as a joint-owner gradually decreased and became restricted to maintenance and residence. In Yājñavalkya we find a chaste wife holding certain rights against her renegade husband. According to him, "He who forsakes a wife though obedient to his commands, diligent in household management, mother of an excellent son and sweet spoken, shall be compelled to pay the third part of his wealth, or, if poor, to provide a maintenance for that wife."[33] In the matter of partition Yājñavalkya allows a wife to get an equal share with her own son or sons, when the division is made in the life-time of her husband. In his words, "If he makes the allotments equal, his wife, to whom no separate property has been given by her husband or her father-in-law, must be rendered partaker of like portions."[34] In case she has *strīdhana* from her father-in-law, then she is entitled to half the share. He also stresses that the wife would have an equal share at the time of partition[35] if she performed *śrāddha* etc. to the manes. In case of property (*strīdhana*) given by her husband or father-in-law, only that much will be allotted to her which would make her share equal to that of a son. He also makes a provision for the maintenance of the superseded wife, providing that she should be given an equal share as a compensation for the supersession, if no *strīdhana* has been given to her. If the case is reverse then only half would be allotted.[36] Yājñavalkya also provides for the maintenance of childless wives who were of good character.[37]

Yājñavalkya defines *strīdhana* thus: "What has been given to a woman by the father, the mother, the husband, or a brother, or has been received by her at the nuptial fire, and what comes to her on account of supersession is *strīdhana*."[38] He also writes: "What has been given to her by her kindered (i.e. persons who are related through the father, or the mother), as well as her fee or gratuity, or what has been presented to her (after marriage) by her hunband's or her father's family, is termed as *strīdhana*."[39]

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[33] *Yāj.*, II. 76.

[34] *Yāj.*, II. 115.

[35] *Ibid.*, II.123.

[36] *Ibid.*, II.148.

[37] *Ibid.*, II.76.

[38] *Ibid.*, II.144.

[39] *Ibid.*, II.145.

A few centuries later there seems to have occurred no change in the definition of *strīdhana* as Nārada states: "What was given before the nuptial fire, what was presented in the bridal procession, her husband's donation, and what has been given by her brother (*bhrātṛdāya*), mother or father is termed as the six-fold property of a woman."[40]

Similarly, according to Vishṇu, the property of a woman is "That which her father, mother, sons or brothers have given her, that what she received before the nuptial fire (or the bridal procession) or when her husband took a second wife; what her husband agreed to be her prequisite; and what is received from his or her kinsmen as a gift subsequent to marriage."[41]

Further developments in the *Smṛti* law on *strīdhana* were due to Kātyāyana. He gives the most liberal meaning of *strīdhana* in about twenty-seven verses. He first defines the six kinds of *strīdhana* mentioned by the the older writers, namely what was given to a woman before the nuptial fire (*adhyagni*),[42] what was given to her at the time of the bridal procession (*adhyāvāhanika*),[43] what was given to a woman through affection (*prītidatta*), and what was received from the brother, the mother or the father.[44] To the above Kātyāyana adds other kinds of *strīdhana* such as the bride-price (*śulka*), what was obtained by a woman after marriage from the family of her husband or her parents (*anvadheya*), and what was obtained by a married woman in her husband's house or by a maiden in the house of her father (*saudāyika*). As a result all the property (whether movable or immovble) received by a woman, either as a maiden or at marriage, or after marriage from her parents or from the husband and his family (expect immovable property given by the husband), is included within the scope of *strīdhana*.[45] Kātyāyana, however, limits the amount of *strīdhana* to 2,000 *paṇas* which could be given to a woman by her relations.[46] He disallows gift of immovable property by husband or his relatives in her favour. He does not consider the wealth obtained by a woman through mechanical arts or by gifts from a stranger as her *strīdhana*.

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[40] *Nārada*., XIII. 8.

[41] *Vishṇu*., XVII. 18.

[42] Kātyāyana, quoted in *Aparārka*, p.715.

[43] *Ibid*.

[44] *Ibid*.

[45] *Ibid*., p.751.

[46] Kātyāyana quoted in *Smṛti Chandrikā*, p.652.

As regards *saudāyika*, Vyāsa explains it as "whatever property has been obtained by the girl, at marriage or after marriage, from the house of her father and of her husband, has been declared to be *saudāyika*."[47]

If we compare the provisions of Manu and Yājñavalkya about *strīdhana*, we note some significant differences which arise from the fact that while Manu regards marriage as a sacrament, Yājñavalkya sees it as a contract between the husband and wife.[48] What is received by a woman as a token of love (evidently from her husband, as Nārada explains)is not recongnised as *strīdhana* by Yājñavalkya for this would form part of the marriage contract. He includes the property or money that would come to her in case of her supersession, for in the case of supersession the contract is broken, at least partially, and she is to be compensated for it. This does not find a place in Manu as he entertained a different concept of marriage.

The word *strīdhana* was used by the *Smṛti* writers as a technical term and not in its simple etymological sense. In the beginning it included six types of property and gradually three more types were added to it. Kātyāyana included all such types of property which a woman received, whether it was movable or immovable, whether she got it before, at the time of, or after her marriage from her parents or relatives of the parents or the husband, or from their family. But the property which a woman obtained after her marriage from strangers and through her skill was not included in *strīdhana*.[49] The social existence of a married woman was completely merged with that of her husband, so that she could not be the recipient of a gift from anyone except her relatives.

Thus the chief *Smṛti* texts of this period dealing with *strīdhana* describe only certain kinds of property as *strīdhana* and not all kinds of property possessed by a woman. It is evident that none of the *Smṛti* texts gives any clear definition of *strīdhana*. They enumerate and describe different kinds of *strīdhana* without aiming at any logical classification. The number of its kinds was gradually increased. Sometimes it is said to be six and sometimes nine. Kātyāyana enumerates six kinds but adds several other categories as well.

A woman had power to dispose of certain types of property forming part of her *strīdhana*. According to Kātyāyana "what a woman acquires, either after marriage or before it, either in the mansion of her husband or of her father, receives from her lord or her parents, is called a gift from affectionate relations (*saudāyika*), and such a gift having been presented through kindness as a means of livelihood is declared by law to be her absolute property."[50] The right of woman over such a gift is recognised. She has power to sell it or give it away as she pleases, even though it may consist of lands and houses.[51] Neither the husband, nor the son, nor the father, nor the brother, has the power to use or alienate the legal property of a woman.[52]

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[47] Vyāsa quoted in *Aparārka*, p.751.

[48] Chattopadhyaya, Sudhakar, *Social Life in Ancient India*, p.125.

[49] Kātyāyana quoted in *Smṛti Chandrikā*, p.654.

Kātyāyana mentions the following restriction to this rule: "What a woman has received as a gift from her husband she may dispose it off, at pleasure after his death, if it be movable; but as long as he lives let her preserve it with frugality, or she may commit to his family."[53]

Similarly, Nārada says that she may, after the death of her husband, enjoy at pleasure "property given to her husband through affection or may give it away, except land or houses."[54] Her right over *strīdhana* is attested by Bṛhaspati also when he emphasises that a woman's *strīdhana* cannot be taken by her co-heirs. Such a property, whether immovable or not, as has been given to woman by her father-in-law, can never be taken away from her by her co-heirs.[55]

Thus, most *Smṛtikāras* lay down that woman has absolute and independent ownership over her *saudāyika strīdhana* (gifts from affectionate relations), except the gifts received from her husband. However, she had absolute power to dispose them off only after his death, in case it did not consist of immovable property.

Some records and literary works of the Gupta period confirm the fact that women were free to spend the money received from their parents as a dowry or from any other source, according to their own wishes. The Sāñchī stone inscription of 131 (450 A.D.)[56] refers to gifts to some *dīnāras* for feeding Buddhist *bhikshus* and for permanent lighting of lamps before the image of the Buddha to the *Ārya Saṁgha* at Kākanādaboṭavihāra by Upasikā Harisvāminī, wife of Sanasiddha, for the sake of her parents. It has been rightly inferred from this inscription that Harisvāminī made this religious gift out of her personal fund or *strīdhana*[57]

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[50] Kātyāyana quoted in *Dāyabhāga*, p.76.
[51] *Ibid.*
[52] *Ibid.*, p.78.
[53] *Ibid.*, p.76.
[54] Nārada quoted in *Aparārka*, p.752.
[55] *Bṛh.*, XXV. 86.
[56] *CII*, III, No.62, p.261.

The Gadhwa stone inscription of Chandragupta II, dated 407 A.D.[58] records a gift of ten *dīnāras*, apparently as a contribution to a Brāhmaṇical institution, a perpetual alms-house or a charitable hall for its Brāhmaṇa community (*sadā-sattra-sāmānya-Brāhmaṇa*). This gift was made by the wife of a house-holder (*gṛhasthasya bhāryā*) possibly out of her *strīdhana*, for the purpose of furthering her own religious merit.

In the *Mṛchchhakaṭika*, when the jewel-casket of courtesan Vasantasenā was stolen, the wife of Chārudatta gives her own *ratnāvalī* inherited from her parent's side to save her husband from dishonour.[59] In the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* also queen Ratnadevī, wife of king Jayasiṁha invests her wealth to establish pious buildings.[60]

There is another aspect regarding the right of the disposal of *strīdhana*. The husband is also given some right over it under exceptional circumstances—when the family is in distress or for religious ceremonies or during illness or in time of great calamity. There were some law-givers who believed that the *strīdhana* utilised by the husband should be returned, while others, including Yājñavalkya, are rather lenient abouts its re-payment. Yājñavalkya states that "If a husband needs it in famine, or for the performance of religious acts, or during illness or during distress the husband need not repay it to her."[61] Of all the *Smṛti* writers, Kātyāyana has written elaborately on this subject. He says: "Neither the husband, nor the son, nor the father, nor the brother, has power to use or to alienate the legal property of a woman,"[62] "And if any of them shall consume such property against her consent, he shall be compelled to pay its value with interest to her and should also be punished."[63] But if he takes it with her consent, he shall pay back the principal amount only and that too when he has enough wealth to restore it.[64] "Whatever she has put amicably into the hands of her husband afflicted by disease, suffering from distress, or sorely pressed by creditors, he should repay that by his own free will." Still Kātyāyana, protecting the wife's right, writes: "yet more, if he has taken a second wife, and no longer gives his wife the honour due to her, the king shall compel him, even by violence, to restore her property, though it was put amicably into his hands." "In case he fails to repay", says Kātyāyana, "the husband is bound to give some part of her property as *strīdhana* to his wife: if he dies without fulfilling this condition his heirs are required to do so."[65] Vishṇu also says, "ornaments worn by women when their husbands were alive, the heirs shall not divide among themselves; if they divide them, they become outcastes."[66] In addition to the above rights, Nārada declares that adverse possession could not deprive a woman of her title to *strīdhana*.[67]

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[57] Cf. Goyal, S.R., *Guptakālīna Abhilekha*, Meerut, 1984, p.192.

[58] *CII*, III, No.7, pp.37ff., Goyal, S.R., *op.cit.*, p.110f.

[59] *Mṛchchhakaṭika*, III, p.183.

[60] *Rājataraṅgiṇī*, VII.24, 33.

[61] *Yāj.*, II. 148.

[62] Kātyāyana quoted in *Aparārka*, p.752.

[63] *Ibid.*, p.755.

[64] Kātyāyana, quoted in *Aparārka*, p.755.

Thus, we see that the husband could use wife's *strīdhana*, except the *saudāyika*. However, stress is laid on the fact that he could use *strīdhana* but only with an obligation to return it. If the husband used if for some other purposes, besides the ones enumerated above, without the consent of his wife, he was considered to be guilty and supposed to return it with interest. But if he used it with her consent he was supposed to pay back only the principal amount whenever he was in a position to do so. If the husband neglected his first wife for the sake of the second wife, he was forced to give a part of his property to the former. But if some property was received by her as gifts from persons other than her relations or was acquired by her through her skill it remained under husband's control.

In the Gupta period the right of women to succeed to *strīdhana* made further advance. While earlier it was equally divided between sons and daughters, now the daughter alone had the right of succession. The rules of inheritance to *strīdhana* in general are not definite and clear; there are also differences among the *Smṛtikāras* on this point.[68] Early *Dharmasūtra* writers differ materially from Manu and Kauṭilya. They all preferred daughters to sons as regards the succession to *strīdhana*, whereas Kauṭilya and Manu laid down that sons and daughters shall jointly succeed to *strīdhana* left by their mother. Manu further stated that the *yautika* is the share of the unmarried daughters alone.

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[65] *Ibid.*

[66] Kātyāyana quoted in *Smṛti Chandrikā*, p.656.

[67] *Vishṇu.*, XVII. 22.

[68] *Nārada.*, II. 83.

The *Smṛtikaras* of this period generally gave preference to daughters in right to succeed to *strīdhana*. But Kātyāyana, Śaṅkha-Likhita and Bṛhaspati give this right to both sons and daughters. Among all the law-givers, Kātyāyana has given the most detailed account of the succession to *strīdhana*. He states, "Sisters, whose husbands are living, should share with their brothers the *strīdhana* of their mother; this is the rule of law about *strīdhana* and partition among brothers and sisters as prescribed."[69] On failure of daughters, the *strīdhana* devolved on sons of the deceased woman.

As regards the property of a maiden, there is no difference at all regarding the succession to their property. On her death it devolved first on her full brothers, then on the mother, and then on the father. Yājñavalkya[70] provides that "if a girl who had been promised in marriage dies before marriage, the intended bridegroom is entitled to take back the *śulka* or other gifts made by him after deducting the expenses of her family."

The *Smṛtikāras* of this period generally gave preference to daughters in right of succession to *strīdhana*. Yājñavalkya follows the laws laid down by some of the earlier *Dharmasūtra* writers. He differs from Manu and Kauṭilya and states: "Of the mother's property what remains after paying-off her debts, shall be taken by the daughters and in their absence by the sons and other offsprings."[71]

Like Yājñavalkya, Vishṇu[72] also believes "that a woman's *strīdhana* goes to her daughters after her death."[72] Nārada[73] also prescribes that daughters should inherit their mother's *strīdhana*, and in their absence, their daughters and then their offsprings (sons). Even Parāśara declares that the unmarried daughter has the right to inherit *strīdhana* but if there is no unmarried daughter, then the sons and the married daughters equally divide their mother's *strīdhana*. On failure of daughter, the *strīdhana* devolves on sons of the deceased woman.[74] But Śaṅkha-Likhita states that the mother's property is equally divided among the sons and their unmarried sisters.[75] Bṛhaspati also states that *strīdhana* goes to the children which means both sons and daughters.[76]

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[69] Kātyāyana quoted in *Aparārka*, p.721.

[70] *Yāj.*, II. 146.

[71] *Yāj.*, II.117.

[72] *Vishṇu.*, XVII. 21.

[73] Nārada quoted in *Mitāksharā*, p.850.

[74] Kātyāyana quoted in *Aparārka*, p.721.

[75] Śaṅkha-Likhita quoted in *Dāyabhāga*, p.79.

[76] *Bṛh.*, XXV. 87.

Although Bṛhaspati gives the right to inherit *strīdhana* to both sons and daughters, he gives preference to unmarried daughters; and for the married ones, he lays down that they should get a nominal part of it as a token of love. He says that *strīdhana* goes to the children. Among them the daughter, if not betrothed, has a share in it. If she is married she shall receive an honorific trifle only.[77]

The succession to *strīdhana* of childless woman differs according to the forms of marriage also. Jurists have laid down certain specific rules for it. Yājñavalkya[78] states that in the case of a childless woman, whose marriage was performed according to one of the first four forms of marriage, *strīdhana* would go to her husband. This rule was introduced because in the first four forms of marriage, the father gifts the daughter with presents to her husband; hence, it goes to her husband. Further, it is said, that if the girl is married according to the last four forms of marriage, her property goes to her father, because in these forms of marriage the girl was not gifted to the groom; hence her property that comes from the paternal source reverts to the father. Vishṇu,[79] Nārada[80] and Kātyāyana[81] also hold the same opinion.

However, about a childless woman Bṛhaspati,[82] says that "the mother's sister, wife of the maternal uncle, wife of the paternal uncle, father's sister, mother-in-law, elder brother's wife—these have been declared to be equal to the mother. If these have no legitimate child of the body, nor step-son, nor daughter's son, nor the son of these (of son and of step-son)— then their sister's son and the rest shall inherit their property."

As regards the types of *strīdhana*, jurists laid down certain rules for its succession. Yājñavalkya[83] says, "In case of a woman dying without issues, her kinsmen shall obtain what she has got from them either as her nuptial fee or as the *anvadheya* present." Kātyāyana[84] also holds the same opinion. Śaṅkha-Likhita[85] also entitles the husband to take the nuptial fee. Kātyāyana further states that in the absence of the kinsmen who have the *strīdhana*, the *strīdhana* goes to her husband. Whatever immovable property was given by the parents to their daughter, always goes to her brother if she dies without an issue.[86]

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[77] *Ibid.*

[78] *Yāj.*, II.146.

[79] *Vishṇu* quoted in *Vivādaratnākara.*

[80] Nārada quoted in *Vivādaratnākara*, p.519.

[81] Kātyāyana quoted in *Smṛti Chandrikā*, p.665.

[82] *Bṛh.*, XXV. 88-89.

[83] *Yāj.*, II. 145.

[84] Kātyāyana quoted in *Dāyabhāga*, p.92.

[85] Śaṅkha-Likhita quoted in *Smṛti Chandrikā*, p.665.

The above analysis shows that most of the jurists were in favour of making daughters inheritors of the *strīdhana* and in their absence their off-springs who derive this right through them; in case of their failure, the *strīdhana* would revert to the original source from where it came.

In short, we may infer that preference was given to daughters in the matter of succession to *strīdhana*. In a patriarchal society, the sons get preference in all matters of succession; the property always belongs to the male. In the matriarchal society, the succession is regulated through daughters and thus in this aspect i.e. in matter of succession to *strīdhana* we can possibly trace the influence of the matriarchal system on the Brāhmaṇical laws. It is not unlikely that the daughter's right to *strīdhana* also came from the same source.

III

In the Classcial age the property rights of woman improved. The first to acquire these rights was the widow.

About the beginning of the Christian era both the *niyoga* and widow-remarriages fell into disrepute. It was deemed to be more honourable for a widow to spend her remaining life in penance. Leaders of the society began to feel that if the widow was not to marry or beget a son by *niyoga*, she must be assigned a definite share in the family property. Early *Dharmasūtra* writers were inclined to assign only maintenance to the widow but the situation began to improve from 100 A.D. Amongst the *Dharmaśāstra* writers of this age Yājñavalkya is the first to espouse the cause of the widow. He was the first to advocate that a widow shall inherit the whole estate in the absence of a son. According to him,[87] "A wife, daughters, both parents, brother, likewise and gentiles, cognates, their sons, a pupil and fellow student in theology, will inherit. In the absence of the first of these the next in order shares the estate of him who has gone to heaven leaving no male issue; this law extends to all classes." When Yājñavalkya states 'leaving no male issue' he means leaving no son, grand-son or great grand-son. All his commentators also give nearly the same explanation and place the wife as the first heir of a sonless husband.

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[86] Vṛddha Kātyāyana quoted in *Dāyabhāga*, p.92.

[87] *Yāj.*, II. 136-37.

Yājñavalkya's name will always be remembered for endowing women with the right of inheritance, a tradition that persists even today in our country. Both Manu and Kauṭilya did not hold this opinion. The question, therefore, arises as to what might have been the source of Yājñavalkya's inspiration.

We should note that in many respects Yājñavalkya followed Gautama and Gautama explicitly and categorically states that the wife should obtain the property of the husband who dies childless. Therefore, it may be surmised that most likely Yājñavalkya was influenced by Gautama while giving such a right to women. While commenting on a hymn of the *Ṛgveda*[88] Yāska makes the interesting observation that in the southern country, when a man dies without leaving a son, the widow goes to the assembly hall, stands upon a stool and after the members strike her with dice, she inherits the property of her deceased husband. According to Kane this implies that in Northern India widows did not succeed to their husband's property in Yāska's time,[89] whereas the early *Dharmasūtra* writers like Gautama allowed the widow to succeed to the property of her husband if he died childless. Obviously they were influenced by the custom prevailing in the southern region.

A little later Vishṇu[90] also joined Yājñavalkya in championing the widow's cause. He states: "the wealth of him who leaves no male issue goes to his wife; on failure of her to his daughter; if she be dead, to the son of a daughter; if there be no such grand-son, to the father; in his default to the mother."[91]

This provision of Yājñavalkya and Vishṇu was a sensational one as it affected the interests of the male coparceners. Therefore, we find that considerable and determined opposition was made to it and orthodox jurists like Nārada were not prepared to recognise the widow as an heir. According to Nārada[92] on failure of the sons, the daughter, *sakulyas, bandhus*, a man of the same caste and the king were to succeed, in this order. He lays down that if a man dies without any issue or heir, his property should ultimately go by escheat to the king, who was to provide only a maintenance to the widow.[93] It is clear that Nārada did not mind property escheating to the crown; but he would not, in any case, allow it to be inherited by the widow. In the *Abhijñāna Śākuntalam* of Kālidāsa we also find that the sonless widow did not succeed to the wealth of her deceased husband, but was only entitled to maintenance and the estate escheated to the king. This is clear from the letter written by the minister to king Dushyanta about the wealth of a merchant who perished in the shipwreck.[94]

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[88] *Ṛgveda*, I.124.7.

[89] Kane, P.V., *HDS*, Vol.III, p.585.

[90] *Vishṇu.*, XVII. 4-7.

[91] *Ibid.*

[92] Nārada quoted in *Vivādaratnākara*, p.597.

[93] *Nārada.*, XIII. 52.

Nārada also lays down that "if among several brothers, one who is childless dies or becomes an ascetic the others should divide the property except *strīdhana;* they should make provision for his widow till her death in case she remains faithful, but if she is otherwise (i.e. unfaithful) they must cut off the allowance."

Nārada is also supported by Śaṅkha-Likhita[95] and Paithinasi.[96] According to them, "The effects of him who dies leaving no male issue goes to his brothers; in the absence of a brother, let both the parents take it or the eldest wife; after these a kinsman bearing the same family name, a pupil, lastly a fellow student in theology."

Kātyāyana, with Nārada and others, apparently held an identical view when he states, "on failure of male issue, the father shall take the estate acquired by his son after partition or the brothers or the natural mother or the paternal grand-mother in regular order."[97] He says that the wife who is chaste shall inherit the husband's property, in her absence the daughter, if she is unmarried and unsettled.[98] He further states: "on the death of her husband the woman is entitled to food and raiment or, in the event of his being undivided coparcener, she receives a portion of property till her death."[99] He adds that "The sonless widow faithful to her husband's bed and living with her elders shall patiently enjoy (the husband's property) till her death. After her, the heirs shall receive it."[100] She can enjoy the allotted share if she is devoted to the service of her elders. In case she is not devoted to their service she shall not receive food and clothing.[101]

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[94] *Abhijñāna Śākuntalam*, Act. VI.

[95] Śaṅka quoted in *Aparārka*, p.741.

[96] Paithinasi quoted in *Aparārka*,p.744.

[97] Kātyāyana quoted in *Aparārka*,p.745.

[98] Kātyāyana quoted in *Mit.*, p.727.

[99] Kātyāyana quoted in *Smṛti Chandrikā*, p.698.

[100] *Ibid.*, p.677.

[101] *Ibid.*, p.679.

There were, however, several thinkers who did not agree with this state of affairs but lacked necessary courage to recommend that the widow should be recongnised as a full heir. They proposed midway measures. Vyāsa[102] recommended that the wife should be allowed to inherit property worth about 2000 *paṇas* in addition to any *strīdhana* that may have been given to her by her husband. In the *Mahābhārata*[103] the limit is set at 3000 *paṇas*.

A third view was that the widow may be a deferred heir and should be allowed to inherit on failure of brother-in-law if her parents-in-law had no objection to the property devolving on her.[104]

But the reformists were not prepared to accept such compromises. They insisted that a widow's right to inherit the full share should be recognised. They based the widow's cause on logic and reason.

Bṛhaspati attempted to establish a new theory about the succession of widow. He says: "In scriptures, in law, in sacred ordinances, in popular usage, a wife is declared by the wise to be half of the body of her husband, equally sharing the fruit of pure and impure acts."[105] Then, in the very next stanza he pleads: "of him whose wife is not deceased half the body survives; how should some other one take the property while half the body of the owner lives?"[106] He thus opines, "Although distant kinsmen, although his father and mother, although uterine brothers be living, the wife of him who dies leaving no male issue shall succeed to his share."[107] "Since she was previously espoused in due form, she must support the consecrated fire, and after the death of her husband the widow, faithful to her lord, shall take his wealth. This is the primeval law."[108] "Taking his effects, movable and immovable, the precious and base metals, the grains, liquids and clothes, let her cause the several *śrāddhas* to be offered in each month, in the sixth, and at the close of the year."[109]

Bṛhaspati, however, lays down exhaustive rules by which widow's right of inheritance in his opinion should be regulated. According to him, the widow is the surviving half of her husband and should, therefore, inherit his whole property, with the condition that she performs his *śrāddha* and other pious acts; or else she should inherit only the movable property. She should receive only a maintenance if the husband was living in a joint family.

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[102] Vyāsa quoted in *Aparārka*, p.752.

[103] *Mbh.*,XIII.82.24.

[104] Śaṅkha in *Mit.* on *Yāj.*, II.136.

[105] *Bṛh.*, XXV.46.

[106] *Ibid.*, XXV.47.

[107] *Ibid.*, XXV.48.

[108] *Ibid.*, XXV.49.

[109] *Ibid.*, XXV.50.

In the fragmentary *Smṛtis* like that of Bṛhat Manu the widow's right of inheritance is often recognised. However, there too it is subject to certain conditions. According to Bṛhat Manu,[110] the sonless widow should receive the whole property of her husband if she leads a chaste and strictly religious life.

From this discussion it is apparent that many rights were given to the widow in husband's property. Yet, several limitations were also imposed by the jurists on the use of the property inherited by her. According to Bṛhaspati she could neither sell, nor gift, nor mortgage such inherited property. He states that only a small portion can be gifted by her, and that too for only religious purposes.[111] Nārada also does not give full rights to the wife even over her *strīdhana,* if it consisted of any immovable property. He says, "The sages declare that the transactions of a woman have no validity, especially the gift, hypothecation or sale of a house or field. Such transactions are valid when they are sanctioned by the husband, or on failure of the husband, by the son and on failure of husband and son, by the king. Excepting immovable property, whatever has been given to a wife by her loving husband, may be spent or given away as she likes after his death."[112] According to Kātyāyana inheritance was to revert to reversioners at the death of the widow, as she has no power to dispose it off.[113] Vishṇu and Yājñavalkya have said nothing on this point.

None of the above jurists give widow absolute right to dispose of or gift away the immovable property though she could partly give it away for religious purposes. Thus, although the widow was granted the right to inherit her husband's property, her rights were limited. However, in inscriptions[114] and land grants, many gifts and donations of lands given by ladies are recorded. It seems, therefore, that the women too had the right to succeed to the property of their husbands. This leads us to believe that the laws of Vishṇu and Yājñavalkya prevailed to a great extent. Such a practice might have been due to the discontinuance of remarriage, divorce and *niyoga* in the society. After the discontinuance of these customs, the widows had no other means of maintenance and subsistence, particularly when they had to remain unmarried after the death of the husband.

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[110] Bṛhat Manu quoted in *Aparārka*,p.742.

[111] *Bṛh.* quoted in *Smṛti Chandrikā*, p.677.

[112] *Nārada.*, I.26-27.

[113] Kātyāyana quoted in *Smṛti Chandrikā*, p.677

[114] *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol.VIII, p.60; Nasik Cave Inscription of queen Balasiri. Cf. Goyal, S.R., *Prāchīna Bhāratīya Abhilekha Saṁgraha*, Jaipur, 1982.

IV

Ancient Indian law-givers were considerate in giving some share directly or indirectly to the daughter. Manu was the leader of the school of those advocates who kept in mind the socio-economic hardships of the fatherless unmarried daughter and assigned one-fourth share to her. In that period if a girl's father died before performing her marriage, his son or sons were bound to incur the marriage expenses of their sister. These expenses were met from the share which they inherited from their deceased father's property. The amount which a brother had to spend on his sister's marriage was one-fourth. According to Yājñavalkya,[115] "Uninitiated brothers should be initiated by those for whom the ceremonies have been already perfomed but sisters should be disposed-off in marriage, giving them as an allotment, a fourth part of a brother's share." Bṛhaspati also supports allotment of one-fourth share to the daughter who has brothers. He says: "But on the father's death, the mother shall take a share equal to that of a son. The mother shall share equally with the sons, the maidens shall take fourth part of a share."[116] Similarly Kātyāyana held that the daughter should get one-fourth share out of her father's property. In the event of the property being small the shares were to be divided equally.[117] Vishṇu, however, recommends a share to a daughter in her father's property, even if she had brothers. He declares, "Mothers are entitled to a share proportionate to their son's share and so are the unmarried daughters."[118] He further elaborates that the daughter's share in her patrimony was for her maintenance till her marriage, and the brother should marry his unmarried sister with a share from his property.[119] Thus he assigns an equal share to the unmarried daughter.

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[115] *Yāj.*, II.127.

[116] *Bṛh.*, XXV.64.

[117] Kātyāyana quoted in *Smṛti Chandrikā*, p.625.

[118] *Vishṇu.*, XVIII.34-35.

[119] *Ibid.*,30.

Nārada also assigns a share to the daughter along with the brother in her father's property. According to him, "To the eldest son a larger share shall be allotted, and a lesser share be assigned to the youngest son. The rest shall take equal shares and so shall an unmarried sister."[120]

Although Nārada has given the daughter a share in her father's property, she was not entitled to take her share after her marriage. Nārada intended that an unmarried daughter should have right of maintenance till her marriage. Elaborating this, he says: "If he (father) has left a daughter, her father's share is destined for her maintenance. They (brothers) shall maintain her upto the time of her marriage; afterwards let her husband keep her."[121]

Thus we find that all the jurists of the period assign to the daughter (who has brothers also) one-fourth share out of the father's property. This share no doubt, was for her maintenance till her marriage and also for making adequate provision for her marriage. However, in no case was she allowed to take away her share after her marriage.

The position of daughter was further protected in case of the death of her mother by providing her exclusive right over *strīdhana*. She was considered to be the only heir of her mother's property. Yājñavalkya states: "of the mother's property what remains after paying off her debts, shall be taken by the daughters; and in their absence, their off-springs."[122] According to Jayaswal it is "a marked tendency of partiality of Yājñavalkya for the enfranchisement of women" and that "he is compensating her for the absence of her right in the father's estate as against brothers."[123]

Vishṇu also favours the daughters to inherit their mother's *strīdhana* after her death. According to him, "If she (mother) dies leaving children, her wealth goes in every case to her daughter."[124] Nārada also supports the view that the *strīdha*na of a woman should be inherited by her daughters, and in their absence by the daughter's children. He states: "The father being dead, the sons shall divide the estate as they ought (and so shall), daughters (divide the property of their mother when she dies); on failing daughters, their issues."[125]

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[120] *Nārada.*, XIII.13.

[121] *Nārada.*, XIII.27.

[122] *Yāj.*, II.117.

[123] Jayaswal, *Manu and Yājñavalkya*, p.257.

[124] *Vishṇu.*, XVII.21.

[125] *Nārada.*, XIII.2.

Bṛhaspati prefers only the unmarried daughters to inherit their mother's *strīdhana*. According to him, the married ones should get a nominal share as a token of love. "*Strīdhana* goes to the children, and the daughter, if not betrothed, has a share in it. If she is married, she shall receive an honorary trifle only."[126]

Like Bṛhaspati, Parāśara also prefers the unmarried daughter to inherit her mother's property. If there is no unmarried daughter, the sons and the married daughters shall equally divide their mother's estate.[127]

Śaṅkha-Likhita, however, held that "mother's property is equally divided among the sons and their married sisters."[128] Kātyāyana also says that the mother's *strīdhana* should be inherited by her sons and daughters. He says, "sisters whose husbands are living should share with their brothers the *strīdhana* and partition should be (among brothers and sisters). In the absence of daughters the wealth (*strīdhana*) devolves on sons (of the deceased woman)."[129]

Thus, we see that most of the law-givers of this period have given preferential right to the daughters to inherit their mother's property, although some have given equal share to the brothers also, and there are some who support the view in respect of a married daughter getting some share in *strīdhana*. It is difficult to make an assessment as to the actual practual practice followed in the matter of inheritance of *strīdhana*. However, moral binding must have played a great role in this matter.

Despite some difference both son and daughter were considered as representatives of their parents. The brotherless daughter had a right to inherit the father's property as *putrikā*. Yājñavalkya[130] also gives a share to the brotherless daughter in her father's property. He gives first place in the list of inheritors to the widowed wife, while the daughter is given the second place.

Like Yājñavalkya, Bṛhaspati also says: "The wife is declared to succeed her husband's property, and in her default the daughter." A daughter, like a son, springs from each limb of a man. How then should any other person inherit the father's property while she lives? Equal in caste to her father and married to a man of the same caste as her own, virtuous, habitually submissive, she shall inherit her father's property, whether she may have been expressly appointed or not. As her father's wealth becomes her property, her son becomes the owner of his mother's and maternal grand-father's wealth, even though kinsmen may have been in existence."[131] Vishṇu also states that the property of a sonless person goes to his wife and in her absence to his daughter.[132] It may be noted that in the period under discussion the practice of *putrikā* was getting obselete, although mention of the practice continued. Vishṇu, therefore, takes a contradictory position. On the one hand, he writes that the daughter will inherit after the mother, and, on the other hand, observes that whether she is made a *putrikā* or not she is as good as a *putrikā*, who according to the custom gets precedence over the mother.[133] Inference seems to be, and it is supported by Yājñavalkya as well, that the ordinary daughters are to be recognised as heir to the property of their father, of course, after their mother.

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[126] *Bṛh.*, XXV.87.

[127] Parāśara quoted in *Parāśaramādhavīya*, III, p.552

[128] Śaṅkha-Likhita quoted in *Dāyabhāga*, p.79.

[129] Kātyāyana quoted in *Aparārka*, p.271

[130] *Yāj.*, II.137.

With the passage of time more liberal views began to become popular. Amongst such *Smṛtikāras*, Nārada and Parāśara are the foremost who give a clear right of inheritance to the daughter who was brotherless. Nārada believes that the daughter is like the son for her parents, so in the absence of the son the daughter has the right to inherit her father's property. "On failure of a son, the daughter succeeds because she continues the lineage just like a son, for both a son and a daughter continue the lineage of their father."[134]

There are numismatic and epigraphical evidences to suggest that in the Gupta age, the right of a daughter to inherit her father's property in the absence of a brother was firmly established. The coins of Chandragupta I bearing the legends '*Chandragupta*' and '*Kumāradevī*' and '*Lichchhavayaḥ*' and the claim of Samudragupta to have been a '*Lichchhavi-dauhitra*'[135] appear to point to the fact that Chandragupta I received the Lichchhavi dominion through the right of his wife Kumāradevī who was, in all probability, the only daughter of her parents.[136] The evidences of the *Vishṇu Purāṇa* and the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*, a later source, seem to confirm the above conclusion. The former refers to Satyabhāmā getting right over a jewel named *Sīmantaka* after the death of her father, Satrājit;[137] there is no mention of any brother of hers in the *Purāṇa*. Likewise, in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* we get reference to Anaṅgalekhā, the only child of king Bālāditya, who became a heir to her father's throne.[138]

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[131] *Bṛh.*, XXV.55.

[132] *Bṛh.*, XXV.56.

[133] *Vishṇu.*, XVII.4-13.

[134] Nārada as quoted in *Smṛti Chandrikā*, p.683.

[135] Cf. The Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta.

On failure of daughter, the daughter's son inherits the property. But as in the previous age Gautama, Āpastamba and Vasishṭha had failed to lay down any rules of inheritance for the daughter's son, similarly in this period Yājñavalkya and Vishṇu also have not laid down rules for the inheritance of the daughter's son to the property of his maternal grand-father. Bṛhaspati, however, opines that the daughter's son inherits his maternal grand-father's property in the absence of his mother. He says, "As her (daughter's) father's wealth becomes her property, though kinsmen may be in existence, even then, her son becomes the owner of his mother's and maternal grand-father's wealth."[139] He further says: "both a son's son and the son of an appointed daughter (*putrikā*) cause a man to attain heaven. Both are pronounced to be equal as regards this right of inheritance and the duty of offering funeral balls (*piṇḍas*)."[140]

Parāśara prefers an unmarried daughter as he states: "If a man dies sonless his maiden daughter shall receive his property; if there is no maiden daughter then the married daughter."[141]

In short Yājñavalkya, Vishṇu and Bṛhaspati give a brotherless daughter right to inherit her father's property after widow, but they do not distinguish between married or unmarried daughter, with the exception of Parāśara who prefers the unmarried brotherless daughter to inherit her father's property.[142]

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[136] For the view that Samudragupta was *dauhitra* or *putrikāputra* category son of his maternal grand-father and it was he who inherited the Lichchhavi kingdom, vide, Goyal, S.R., *Guptakālīna Abhilekha*, Meerut, 1984; *Samudragupta Parākramāṅka*, Meerut, 1987; *Gupta Sāmrājya kā Itihāsa*, Meerut ,1987; also his *A History of the Imperial Guptas*, pp.85 ff. Goyal also believes that Samudragupta was the successor of Chandragupta I also. In other words he was a *dvyāmushyāyaṇa*. And so was Rudrasena I Vākāṭaka.

[137] *Vishṇu Purāṇa*, 4.13.131-40.

[138] *Rājataraṅgiṇī* , IV.2.

[139] *Bṛh.*, XXV.58.

[140] *Bṛh.*, XXV.37.

[141] Parāśara quoted in *Smṛtitattva*, p.191.

[142] Kātyāyana quoted in *Smṛti Chandrikā*, p.687.

Thus, we see that in the case of a sonless deceased person, where the wife is not alive, daughter inherits his property. In such cases daughter has the right to inherit her father's property whether she is married or unmarried. However, Kātyāyana and Parāśara are the only jurists who prefer unmarried daughters to inherit their father's property to the married ones.[143] In the absence of the daughter, her son has the right to own his maternal grand-father's property, as is opined by Bṛhaspati.[144] The other law-givers, viz. Yājñavalkya. Vishṇu, Nārada and Kātyāyana do not mention anything regarding such a case.

It may be concluded that in the opinion of Nārada, Kātyāyana and Parāśara the daughter was to inherit the property of her father in the absence of her brothers, while Yājñavalkya, Vishṇu and Bṛhaspati give wife the first place among inheritors, and make the daughter the second inheritor. Further, Vishṇu and Nārada champion the cause of a daughter's share in her partrimony even if she is not brotherless. However, their intention is not to allow the daughter take her share after her marriage, even if she was brotherless.

As regards the inheritance to mother's property daughter's share was a must. Except Śaṅkha-Likhita and Kātyāyana, who give equal share to daughters and sons, all the jurists of this period have preferred daughters to sons, while Bṛhaspati and Parāśara prefer unmarried daughters.

V

There is a great difference of opinion among *Smṛti* writers on the question of mother's right of succession to property. Manu is not definite about the preference between the two parents. At one place he states that when the son dies issueless, the mother takes his wealth, while at another place he provides that the father takes the wealth of a sonless man and at a third place he includes brothers also. Of the jurists of this period, Yājñavalkya gives no clue as to which among the parents is to be preferred if both are alive when their son dies. Bṛhaspati is the only jurist of this age who prefers the mother among all others in the list of successors. He states that when a woman's son has died without leaving a wife or a son, the mother should be taken as entitled to inherit his property, or his brother, with her consent.[145]

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[143] Kātyāyana quoted in *Smṛti Chandrikā*, p.687.

[144] *Bṛh.*, XXV.58,37.

[145] *Bṛh.*, XXV.63.

According to Yājñavalkya, if a person dies without a male issue and if his wife and daughters were also not alive the property goes to the parents.[146]

Nārada believes that the mother is equal to the father as regards her competence to bestow gifts. He says, "property gained by valour, or belonging to a wife, and the gains of science, are three kinds of wealth not subject to partition: and so is a favour conferred by the father's exempt from partition. When the mother has bestowed (a portion of) her property on any (of her sons) from affection, the rule is the same in that case also; for the mother is equal to the father (as regards her competence to bestow gifts)."[147]

Vishṇu also gives the mother the right to own property of a sonless son but he places her after the father. He explains, "The property of a sonless person goes to his wife; on failure of her to his daughter; on failure of her to his father; on failure of him to his mother."[148] Kātyāyana also agrees that the mother inherits such property after the father.[149] Changing the order Paithinasi states that "If a man dies sonless, his property goes to his brother, in the brother's absence his mother and father receive it; or his junior wife."[150]

Thus, we see that although the law-givers of this period bestowed upon the mother the right of succession to her son's property they, with the exception of Bṛhaspati, preferred the father to the mother.

About mother's right on partition, the code of Yājñavalkya gives a new direction. The old laws of Kauṭilya[151] and Manu [152] provided her only with *strīdhana*. She could realise that amount from the estate of her husband. Yājñavalkya with his usual preference for the independence of women, provides against the contingency of her penury.[153] One share equal to that of the sons was to be given to her. This was to be done where nothing had been given to her from the family of the husband, i.e. without any consideration of her wealth received from her father's family.[154]

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[146] *Yāj*., II.136. 173.

[147] *Nārada*., XIII.6-7.

[148] *Vishṇu*., XVII.4-13.

[149] Kātyāyana quoted in *Smṛti Chandrikā*, p.693.

[150] Paithinasi quoted in *Aparārka*, p. 744.

[151] *Arthśāstra*, Ch.59, pp.152-53, 160-61.

[152] *Manu*., IX. 194-200.

[153] *Yāj*., II.115.

[154] *Ibid*.

Yājñavalkya has been followed by Bṛhaspati and Vyāsa in establishing the mother's share. According to Bṛhaspati, "on the death of the father, the mother receives the same share as her sons; their (other) mothers are equal sharers with them; and the girl is entitled to the fourth part of a share."[155] Vyāsa declares, "Even the sonless wives of one's father have been declared to be equal sharers; the father's mother has also been declared to be equal to the mother."[156] Vishṇu[157] also declares that the mother shall receive in accordance with the shares of the sons. Nārada's[158] and Kātyāyana's[159] views also correspond to those of Vishṇu. If the father divides his property during his life-time he is entitled to keep two shares, as suggested by Śaṅkha-Likhita.

It seems that all the jurists borrowed from Yājñavalkya since we find them opposed to the general policy of the *Sūtrakāras* who expressly hold that woman can have no property or share in any estate. It is also against the spirit of Manu from which it deviates in a major way in favour of the mother.

VI

Taking all the points into consideration it may be stated that in the Gupta period the rights of women to property made a radical progress in many vital spheres, although some conservative writers continued to plead for the old order. Now for the first time in Indian history wife was accorded a share in her husband's property equivalent to that of the sons. Moreover if a wife was divorced or superseded she was either compensated monetarily or was given a share in husband's property.The scope of *strīdhana* was further expanded by adding not only bride-price but also what she received after her marriage including, in certain cases, even immovable property. Her exclusive right over *strīdhana* was emphasised to the extent that even her husband had to return it if he had spent it under extreme circumstances. As for the succession to *strīdhana*, generally the opinion emerged that it was to be confined to daughters only.

The rights of widow expanded sensationally. She secured a share in husband's property equivalent to that of the sons. And in case of sonless husband the widow became the first inheritor.

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[155] *Bṛh.* quoted in *Dāyabhāga*,p.69.

[156] Vyāsa quoted in *Dāyabhāga*, pp.67-68.

[157] *Vishṇu.*, XVIII.34.

[158] *Nārada.*, XIII.12.

[159] Kātyāyana quoted in *Dāyabhāga*, p.49.

In case of daughter as well, certain highly progressive developments took place. For the first time brotherless daughter secured, after widow, a claim in the father's property. As regards the daughter with brothers, all the jurists unanimously advocated for the one-fourth share of the brothers' in father's property for their maintenance and marriage. However, some of them like Manu consider it voluntary, while others make it obligatory.

Finally, the mother's position also improved to a certain extent. It was natural as the position of women both as wife and as widow had improved.The mother, even sonless, secured a share equivalent to that of the son in her husband's property. She was also entitled to get the property of an issueless son if latter's wife was not alive.

Thus the Classical Age of Indian history may be described as the Age of Progress and Conservation so far as the rights of women to own property are concerned. Jayaswal ascribes two reasons for this change: social and juridical. Buddhism had enfranchised women. In the *saṁgha* the nun was equal to the monk. The gates of the spiritual and religious rights were equally opened to the despised women as to the self-styled gods on the earth. Nun's sisterhood could and did hold property as much as monks' brotherhood. The conscience of the law-givers questioned, 'Why should not women hold property at law?' 'What should she do when her husband dies?' The law-givers who laid the life-long obligation on her to remain true to one man, must also think of prescribing some rights in return. If the marriage tie is indissoluble and a woman is half the person of the husband, then, as Bṛahaspati put it later, 'How could anybody take the property of the dead man when his half-body is alive?' On the same principle the mother, being half of the father's self, must inherit in the order she was placed by Yājñavalkya.

Besides, we find that the mental horizon of the educated class had been widened by foreign contacts and economic activities. This might have brought about libralisation in property rights. The views of Yājñavalkya, who was from the South, which was relatively liberal towards women, also influenced the North. Sages of North India had approached him to deliver lectures in Mithilā, where he addressed large gathering. All these factors were responsible for the change in the outlook of our legal thinkers of the Gupta age.

24

Economic Decline in the Golden Age?

Lallanji Gopal

The Gupta period is generally termed as the Golden Age or the Classical Age in Indian history. In recent works these appellations have been used by R.C. Majumdar, R.N. Dandekar, K.M. Munshi and also B.S. Upadhyay, who subscribed to Marxist views in his interpretation of Indian history and culture. The notion of Classical Age implies a standardisation of cultural norms which may be emulated in subsequent ages. On account of its cultural achievements the Gupta period has been termed as the Classical Age, being the period of efflorescence of creative activities. The designation Golden Age is used as a paraphrase of the term Classical Age. The absence of relevant information about the economic condition of this age, however, creates an obstacle in its evaluation as the Golden Age of our country.

S.K. Maity[1] has noticed numerous references in Varāhamihira to 'devastating famines, droughts, floods, crop failure and many such natural calamities' to infer that in the Gupta age the poorer working classes were not equally prosperous. The references to' poverty, commercial failure, family ruin and so on' indicate that the economic condition of many people was very precarious. Splendour, opulence and luxury were only for a limited section of the community. To warrant the name of Golden Age far better conditions, economic freedom and prosperity for the whole society would be required. A.L. Basham[2] has commended this analysis for presenting the realities of the Gupta period in its true perspective.

Poverty and economic disparity in greater or lesser measure has existed in all societies and all periods. The search for a golden age of the modern notion will be utopian for ancient period because equal and lasting economic properity for all sections of society in all spheres could simply have never existed. The true golden age fitting in with the aspirations of a community will always be nourished in the future, it cannot be sought in the lap of the immature past. The age of equal prosperity for all could not be ushered even in modern socialist societies with a committed and planned endeavour. It is an ideal whose real relevance is in the effort to realise it.

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[1] Maity, S.K. *Economic Life in Northern India in the Gupta Period*, 2nd edn., pp.243-44.

[2] Foreword to S.K. Maity, *op.cit.*, pp.xvi-xvii.

In history the identification of a golden age is not necessarily the result of a robust nationalism which, disgusted with the present, seeks solace in creating a dream world in the past. In history the identification of a golden age is based on a comparative evaluation of the situations in different periods. The golden age cannot be in absolute terms; it takes into account the limitations imposed by the realities of a given period. The age of pericles in Greece, that of Augustus in Rome and those of Elizabeth and Victoria in England have been generally described as golden ages. Applying the test of prosperity of all sections of society these periods will also fail to retain the designation of golden age. The Gupta period is to be called golden age on a consideration of its economic situation as compared with other periods. The caution sounded by Maity and Basham helps us understand the limitations under which the appellation is to be applied.

In a few recent studies, with a view to denying the Gupta period the title of the golden age, its cultural achievements have been belittled and the darker elements have been laboriously listed. It is said that in the economic sphere the peasants were reduced to the position of agricultural slaves and were shattered by forced labour, exactions and excessive taxes; the shrinkage in trade led to the decline of urban centres.

This assessment suffers from pre-conceived opinions and invalid assumptions. It involves distorted interpretation of facts. Inconvenient facts are suppressed to propound the view on the basis of partial evidence. An impartial analysis of the facts in their fullness does not confirm the view. We do not have sufficient evidence to show that in the agrarian system the decline in the status of peasant was so much pronounced and so widespread as to cause revolutionary changes. Likewise, there was no significant decline in trade; on the contrary there are indications of revival and continuation of trade with the West and further increase in the trade with East and South-east Asia.

The happy and tranquil life of the people in the period is testified to by diverse independent sources. Besides the inference to be derived from the circumstantial evidence of the rich and excellent literary and artistic productions, we have direct confirmatory references. The claim of the composer of the Junagadh inscription that during the reign of Skandagupta "verily no man among his subjects falls away from religion, and there is no one who is distressed, or in poverty, or in misery, or avaricious or who, worthy of punishment, is over much put to torture"[3] may be in the hyperbolic literary style of Sanskrit poetry. But the Chinese Buddhist traveller Fa-hsien visiting India during the reign of Chandragupta II unequivocally certifies that in the Middle Country "the people are numerous and happy. They are not to register their household or attend to any magistrates and their rules... If they want to go, they go, if they want to stay, they stay."[4]

Natural calamities, scarcity and famine can be expected to have caused great suffering. Varāhamihira refers to crop-failure and famine both due to excessive rainfall and drought. Destruction of crops by locusts, birds and wild beasts, earthquakes, hailstorms, epidemics and pestilences were other factors causing damage to life and property.[5] But we have no means for determining the incidence of these calamities. The *Daśakumāracharita* contains an account of a famine. The Junagadh inscription refers to the suffering of the people consequent upon the bursting of the Sudarśana lake on account of excessive rainfall. But no reference to a specific occurrence of famine is required to say that such calamities occurred in the Gupta period as well. In those days of irregular and insufficient transport facilities the relief measures could not have been very effective in mitigating the rigours of the sufferings. The *smṛti* injuctions about the duty of the king to provide help to the poor and the suffering seem to have been admitted by the rulers in some inscriptions, but we cannot be sure about the extent to which such measures were actually helpful.

In recent decades a thesis of an urban decay in the Gupta period has been widely discussed.[6] In its elaborate form it envisages two stages in urban decay, the first in the second half of the third or in the fourth century and the second after the sixth century. This view is based primarily on the evidence of the archaeological excavations. The general trend of decline is suggested by the thinner habitational deposit of the fourth-sixth centuries as compared with those of the preceding three centuries, the poverty of costly objects such as glass goods, ivory objects, beads of precious and semi-precious items and refined pottery, the poor quality of habitational structures and the use of building material of the earlier period in their construction. The gap between the cultural deposits of the Kushāṇa and Sultanate periods indicates desertion of the town. The confirmation of the thesis is sought in the travel accounts of Fa-hsien and Hsüan Tsang and Varāhamihira's *Bṛhatsaṁhitā*.

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[3] *CII*, III, p.62.

[4] Legge, J.H., *Records of the Buddhist Kingdoms*, pp.42-43.

[5] Maity, *op.cit.*, Appendix I.

[6] Sharma, R.S., *Urban Decay in India* (c.300-c.1000), Delhi, 1987. It began with the paper 'Decay of Gangetic towns in Gupta and post-Gupta Times', *PIHC*, 33rd session (1972), pp.92-104. See also Thakur, V.K., *Urbanization in Ancient India*, New Delhi, 1981.

But confirmatory evidence on such a theme can be found only through horizontal excavations which have been attempted in a very limited number of cases. Vertical excavations cannot be expected to yield the necessary relevant information. The demarcation line between the Kushāṇa and Gupta periods is not very prominently perceptible in the sections and is not always precisely datable. The thinner nature of the deposits identified with the Gupta period does not indicate decay, it refers to their chronological span. Very few excavators have reported their feeling on urban decay in the Gupta period. It is a task yet to be taken up through problem-oriented archaeology. The number of material objects and the quality of habitational structures exposed by vertical excavations cannot form a sufficient basis for a comparative analysis of two chronologically successive periods. The use of building material of an earlier period is not a sign of decay, it is a convenient need which people have practised in all ages. The architectural superiority of the Gupta period is well evidenced. A definitive opinion about secular architecture can be passed only when a few specimens are exposed. The testimony of the Chinese travellers has relevance mostly for the decay of Buddhist establishments. The literary evidence does not confirm the suggestion of an urban decay in the Gupta period.[7] The astronomical text *Bṛhatsaṁhitā* is the least relevant text for such information. It gives prophesies on the basis of astronomical considerations which cannot be conceived as recording earlier experiences or contemporary realities. The text is normative in nature and refers to both favourable and unfavourable situations for the same people and professions; there is no guiding principle to determine which account has historical anthenticity for contemporary society.[8]

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[7] The *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Raghuvaṁśa* cannot be interpreted to refer to the decay of Ayodhyā (Sharma, R.S., *op.cit.*, pp.114-15). They refer to the people giving up their normal work out of a sense of profound grief.

The literary evidence is very clear about the existence of cities and their prosperous trade and commerce. We find a graphic description of a number of such cities. These accounts cannot be dismissed as being conventional or unrealistic on the ground that the texts were the products of court culture. There is reason to believe that crafts and industries and trade and commerce did not languish in the Gupta period; these economic activities sustained the cities.

The urban decay is explained as have been caused by the decline of long-distance trade involving Romans, Chinese, Parthians, Kushāṇas and Sātavāhanas. The decline in the international trade no doubt affected the cities immediately connected with it. The cities in the interior depended mostly on the internal trade. The shrinkage of the international trade could not have been of such vital consequence to them as to result in their decay.

The urban decline was connected with the trade across the northwest and is seen in the Kushāṇa core region, the Punjab and the Indus-Gaṅgā divide. The cities in western India were not affected because they maintained their prosperity from the sea-trade. The cities connected with the trade routes from Kashmir to the middle Gaṅgā valley still participated in the overland foreign trade. Pāṭaliputra and other cities in eastern India enjoyed prosperity from the sea-trade with South-east Asia and China.

The social crisis as reflected in the description of the Kali age in the third-fourth centuries' Purāṇas is mentioned as another important factor in the urban decline. It is said to have hit the collection of taxes from the peasants, reduced the purchasing powers of town-dwellers, destroyed local market and under-mined artisanal activities in towns. The dismal accounts of the Kali age in the texts are considered to be the compositions of different periods. Their characteristic feature is a reference to the destruction of the basic elements of the social system and a negation of all values and norms. They are an expression of the despair of the people of any age with the realities of their times. To single out a few of these social abnormalities and to hold them as being applicable to one particular period will not be a valid proposition.

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[8] For a fuller examination see our article '*Bṛhatsaṁhitā* on Urban Decay' to be published in *Professor S. Nurul Hasan Felicitation Volume*.

The decline in the urban centres is attributed to several factors. But most of these, namely, natural disasters, political changes, foreign invasions, feudal wars and religious preferences[9] can explain the destruction of only individual cities and shifts in their location. The phenomenon of deurbanization over the vast stretch of north India will require some fundamental change in economic structure.

Xinru Liu points out that in this period 'urban civilization apparently attained further maturity'. The urban institution of 'nigama' became more complex, guilds developed further, urban dwellers had a voice in state politics and a highly sophisticated urban culture, with a flourishing Sanskrit literature, and emphasis on dress, decoration, recreation and entertainment, developed. The *Kāmasūtra* represents the city life-style very vividly. It is argued that this refined urban culture related only to 'a few rich urban people and their dependents' and 'created only a narrow demand for certain goods', which could not check the phenomenon of the general decline of the urban economy.[10] But this pleading is fallacious because the economy of the cities in the preceding period of urban growth had the same features which are attributed to the present period.

However, towards the close of the period economic prosperity seems to have been adversely affected. The Hun invasions and the waning imperial power created political instability which possibly hampered the flow of trade and also afflicted the peaceful pursuit of other economic activities. There is some archaeological indication of the devastation caused by the Huns. The tottering fortunes of the family, the reduction in the boundaries of the empire and the slackening of the administrative machinery are indicated by the epigraphic records. The determined efforts of Skandagupta to restore stability seem to have lost their impact after Budhagupta. But there is no direct reference to the economic decline in the literary or epigraphic records. The archaeological material also does not confirm any decline in the trade and industries. It is, however, to be admitted that the decline need not be perceptible in the industrial products.

The economic decline in the later part of the Gupta period is often interpreted in terms of the emergence of feudal tendencies. In 1928 Beni Prasad[11] had observed that the Gupta empire 'was dominated by feudalism and that the very idea of a kingdom had become that of a feudal-federal organisation'. Many scholars have used the term 'feudalism' for different periods of Indian history. D.D. Kosambi drew the attention of scholars to the need for a systematic study of feudalism. R.S. Sharma has offered a full-length monograph on feudalism in India. This has led to a spirited discussion on the definition of feudalism, its distinguishing features in India, the validity of the use of the term to refer to Indian situation, and its origin and various phases in its growth.[12]

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[9] Thakur, V.K., *op.cit.*, pp.295-96.

[10] Liu, X., *Ancient India and Ancient China*, p.41.

[11] *The State in Ancient India*, p.285.

According to Prof. Sharma,[13] during the period 6.300-700A.D., which witnessed the origins and first phase of feudalism, its certain broad features noticeable are: 'the granting of both virgin and cultivated land, the transfer of peasants, the extension of forced labour, the restriction on the movements of the peasants, artisans and merchants, the paucity of coins, the retrogression of trade, the abandonment of fiscal and criminal administration to the religious beneficieries, the beginnings of remuneration in revenues to officials, and the growth of the obligations of the *sāmantas*'. They appear in the Gupta period, but are especially noticeable from the post-Gupta period onwards.

The term feudalism has two distinctly differing usages, as a method of government and a socio-economic formation. It is the application of the second which has generally been sought in ancient India and the first is kept at a lower key. But the features of feudalism in the first phase, listed by R.S. Sharma, are not demonstrable in the Gupta period. The origins of feudalism are traced to land-grants to Brāhmaṇas, temples and monasteries, which beginning in the first century B.C. multiplied by Gupta times,[14] implying a decline in commodity production and foreign trade and the growth of a self-sufficient economy. This interpretation of land-grants has been opposed[15] on the ground that the practice amounts to landlordism and not to feudalism and prevailed, without any change, throughout the ancient period.[16] The search for a pre-feudal stage has led to the identification of the description of the Kali age in the Epics and Purāṇas of the third-fourth centuries as reflecting a deep social crisis[17] which in the economic spheres led to a new system in place of the earlier practice of extracting and distributing surplus, by assigning land revenue to the non-producing classes of rulers and priests. But the Kali age account is not the sufficient evidence for proving social crisis feudalising the economy in the Gupta period. Moreover, though the social crisis is envisaged in Brāhmaṇical cultural zones, the epigraphic evidence indicates the early occurrence of land-grants creating landed intermediaries mostly in periphery tribal and backward areas which could not have been the scene for the social crisis of the Kali age.

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[12] Thakur, V.K., *Historiography of Indian Feudalism.*

[13] Sharma, R.S., *Feudalism in India*, p.76.

[14] *Ibid.*, p.263.

[15] Om Prakash, *Early Indian Land Grants and State Economy* (Allahabad, 1988).

[16] Sircar, D.C., *Landlordism and Tenancy in Ancient and Medieval India as Revealed by Epigraphical Records*, pp.32-38; *Political and Administrative Systems*, p.32.

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[17] Sharma, R.S., 'The Kali Age: A Period of Social Crisis', *PIHC*, Hyderabad, 1978; Yadava, B.N.S., 'The Accounts of the Kali Age and the Social Transition from the Antiquity to the Middle Ages', *Indian Historical Review*, Vol.V.

25

Philosophical Background of the Saptamātṛkā Worship in the Gupta Age

Susmita Pande

The cult of Saptamātṛkā became very popular in the Gupta period as is evident from the sculptures and literary and epigraphical evidences of that age. The object of the present article is to examine the philosophical and conceptual background behind the Saptamātṛkā worship and see how did it help in shaping the social values, cultural pattern and spiritual and religious ethos of the Gupta age.

The earliest extant text which deals with the worship of the Mātṛkās is the *Devī Māhātmya*[1], the date of which falls in 400-600 A.D. i.e. in the Gupta and late Gupta period. The Saptamātṛkā images of the Gupta age are modelled exactly after their description in the *Devī Māhātmya*.

The *Devī Māhātmya* (Ch.VIII) lists the Mātṛkās as Brahmāṇī Māheśvarī, Kaumārī, Vaishṇavī, Vārāhī, Indrāṇi and Nārasiṁhī in the context of the killing of Raktabīja. These are regarded as emanations or pure Śaktis of the male Gods—Brahmā, Maheśa, Kārtikeya, Vishṇu, Varāha, Indra and Narasiṁha. The *Devī Māhātmya* (Ch.X) also refers to them as the *vibhūtis* of Durgā. Now we know that the term *vibhūti* means the personification of a particular quality of any god or goddess. In this case they are the personification of different types of energies of the Great Goddess who is called Ambikā, Chaṇḍikā, Kāli and Chāmuṇḍā in her various aspects (Ch.VII). Later on this subtle distinction between emanations and different aspects of the goddess was ignored. The *Vāmana Purāṇa* includes Chāmuṇḍā in the list of the Saptamātṛkās making them eight in number.

The well-defined group of the Saptamātṛkās of the Brāhmaṇical tradition emerged in the Gupta age. Before the Gupta age they are seen as loosely organized band of semi-divine goddesses without clearly defined characters or attributes.

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[1] *Devī Māhātmya* or *Durgā Saptaśatī* is a part of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*. V.S. Agrawala ascribed it to the Gupta age. He has pointed out a number of Gupta motifs in the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*. e.g. the Padminī Vidyā, Kūrma Vibhāga, Mahishāsura story, etc.

The Saptamātṛkā worship of the Gupta age incorporates various elements—Vedic archetypal ideas and symbols, primeval tribal rites and beliefs and Tāntric rites, practices and concepts. These diverse elements explain the ambivalent nature of the Saptamātṛkā concept—they, on one hand, fulfil the desires of the devotees i.e. fertility, fecundation, and on the other, are a band of blood-thirsty ghoulish deities who are summoned to the aid of gods in battle against hosts of demons. It was primarily the notion of power or *śakti* and martial nature that the Saptamātṛkās were associated with in the Gupta age.

M.K. Dhavalikar[2] believes that the group of seven figures in Mohenjo-daro and Harappan seals represent the proto-Mātṛkās out of which the mature concept of Saptamātṛkās developed. But there is no evidence to prove the similarity of ideology behind the group of seven figures on the Indus seals on one hand and the fully developed Saptamātṛkā concept of the Gupta age on the other.

The Vedic symbols and archetypes connected with number seven were the seven celestial rivers as mothers of Soma, the Moon and Agni. The seven rivers were equated with the seven Kṛttikās and were called mothers of mankind and all the animate life on the earth. According to some scholars[3] the number seven was recognized as sacred by the Babylonians, Greeks, Hebrews, as well as the Indo-Aryans in whose cosmology the world was divided into seven regions. Hence, it had a cosmopolitan and universal significance. The number also had a significance in the folk rituals which connect it with the act of recreation and cosmic rythm of the universe. It also signified the idea of pollution and ritual purification. There are countless examples of local, tribal or village goddesses who figure in groups of seven. For example, in the myths of Baiga, Pardhan, Santal and Gadaba tribes witches are found in groups of seven. In South India seven virgins are popular among tribals. Sociologists have analyzed their rituals and have connected them with agrarian and purificatory rites. While the Vedic mothers were mild and benevolent, the seven goddesses in folk traditions are usually fierce. Both these elements were incorporated in the *Mahābhārata* which synthesizes the Vedic and folk traditions. This synthesis finally evolved in the Gupta age as the concept of the Śaktis of Brāhmaṇical gods with a clear-cut iconography and philosophy.

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[2] Dhavalikar, M.K., 'The Origin of the Saptamātṛkās', *Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute*, Poona, 21, (1960-61), pp.22-24.

[3] Harper, Katherine Anne, *The Iconography of the Saptamātṛkās*.

Some scholars explain the two above-mentioned traditions as Vedic Aryan and aboriginal whom, they assume, were non-Aryans.[4] But the Aryan problem is a vexed one. All scholars do not believe in the theory of Aryan tribes fighting against the non-Aryans.[5] Many believe that the Sanskrit speaking Vedic people did not have any distinct racial or ethnic identity. If that is so, it becomes easy to understand (a) the occurrence of the same symbols in the hieratic religion and folk religion, and also (b) why much of the Tāntric rites developed out of primeval tribal practices. Scholars of religious psychology believe that every culture has certain ideas which are regarded by it as true and timeless. These are the racial archetypes or the *a priori* category of all possible functioning.[6] These are the innate ideas or potentialities which are shaped into symbols. The meaning of a symbol can never be known fully because it has both rational and non-rational components. Mātṛkā worship is an archetypal symbol common to folk, tribal as well as hieratic religions and explains the whole experience of a society with regard to its most profound ideas about God, man and cosmos. The Purāṇas and other texts of the Gupta age expressed this unity intellectually, but it was always realized intuitively through the course of centuries.

The second important feature of the Mātṛkā worship of the Gupta age was that it incorporated Tāntric rites. The essence of mother worship lies in the worship of God as a creative power symbolized as the world-mother. The concept of *mātṛkā* or the world-mother has been primarily attributed to fertility cults and fecundation rites. It may be argued that though the concept of fertility of the earth and of the herd must have been a natural desire of the devotees and could have helped in shaping the image of the deity, the notion of the deity was essentially that of power. The Saptamātṛkās are visualized as pure *śaktis* and their martial nature is stressed more than their worship for offsprings etc. Though the bulk of Tāntric literature appeared in the post-Gupta age the main tenets and features of *tantra* can be gleaned from the description of Saptamātṛkā worship in the epigraphical and literary sources of the Gupta age. The Gangadhar inscription of 423-25A.D. speaks of Mayurāksha, a Vaishṇava building a temple full of Ḍākinīs in honour of the Divine Mothers who utter tremendous shouts of joy and stir up the oceans with the mighty wind rising from the magic rites of their religion.[7] The Bihar stone inscription of Skandagupta mentions the divine mothers. It states that a *yūpa* or sacrificial post was constructed for a ceremony involving Skanda and the Seven Mothers. The Devagarh inscription of the sixth century A.D. refers to an early temple of the Divine Mothers. Varāhamihira also refers to the worship of the Divine Mothers by the *mātṛmaṇḍala vidāḥ* or *maṇḍalakrama vidāḥ*. It is interpreted as "those who know fully the circle of Divine Mothers". Here *maṇḍala krama* means *pūjākrama*.

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[4] *Ibid.*, p.11. According to Anne Harper though it is not certain whether the Indus valley people were Dravidians yet the assumption seems to be "reasonably sound".

[5] Pande, G.C., *Foundations of Indian Culture*, Vol.1, p.17. According to him neither do we know whether a conquering Aryan race migrated to India, nor the character of migrations if there were any, and nor if the *Ṛgveda* was composed by the Indo-European speaking immigrants. It might have belonged to a stage when much commingling of races and communities had taken place.

[6] *Collective Works of C.G. Jung*, Vol.16, pp.13, 14, 43, 62.

All these evidences point to two aspects of the Tāntric worship prevalent in the Gupta age: (a) the terrible nature of their rites, and (b) a well-developed science of spiritual realization. The temple in the Gangadhar inscription is called a terrible abode—*veśmātyugram*. Since the temple could not itself be *ugra*, here the word must stand for the Tāntric activities in it. This must be the reason why the Mātṛkā temples were mostly found on the outskirts of the towns.[8] Similarly, reference to *yūpa* in their worship in the Bihar stone inscriptions points to bloody sacrifices.

The Gangadhar inscription also mentions that the Mātṛkā temple was full of Ḍākinīs. Now Ḍākinī had a particular significance as well as a wide connotation in Tāntric worship. Some later lexicons explain Ḍakinī as a special kind of the gaṇas of Kālī (*Ḍākinī Kālī gaṇaviśeshaḥ*)[9] P.C. Bagchi opines that these subordinate deities might have been imported from western Tibet and incoporated in the Śākta Tāntric ritualism. S.B. Das Gupta partially supports this suggestion by tracing its root in the word *ḍāk* which is used in Tibet in the sense of a wise man. He also says that Ḍākinī meant a woman of mystic wisdom raised to the level of divinity[10] or a type of demi-goddess having mystic wisdom as well as supernatural powers or a goddess with mystic wisdom. According to J.N. Banerjea the inscription particularly emphasizes the shouting propensity of the Mothers and their gaṇas. He says that just as the word *ghoshiṇī* in the *Atharvaveda* signifies the female attendants of Rudra, the word Ḍākinī must mean a 'female attendant'.[11] That they were attendants or companions of the Mātṛkās may be believed because in the *Nāradīya Pāñcharātra* Ḍākinī is described as a companion of Pārvatī. Thus, it is quite possible that they were regarded as companions of mothers as well as demi-goddesses or those women who had been raised to the status of divinity and were regarded as possessing mystic wisdom.

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[7] Goyal, S.R., *Guptakālina Abhilekha*, pp.200, 201.

[8] In the seventh century Bāṇa in his *Kādambarī* refers to the ruined *mātṛ* temples in the forests.

[9] Goyal, S.R., *A Religious History of Ancient India*, Vol.II, pp.309-11.

[10] Das Gupta, S.B., *Obscure Religious Cults* p.397; Bhattacharya, N.N., *History of the Tāntric Religion* p.110.

In the later Tāntric tradition there is a clear mention of Śākta Shaṭchakra—Ḍākinī, Hākinī, Lākinī, Yoginī, Rākinī and Śākinī. These were supposed to be situated at the various nerve plexuses or mystic centres within the human body. As the presiding deity of the *mulādhāra chakra* Ḍākinī imparts spiritual knowledge to the aspirant. Whether such a sophisticated idea regarding Ḍākinī was prevalent as early as the Gupta age is not certain, for it gained popularity only from the ninth century onwards. But it can hardly be doubted that the idea of Ḍākinī, as prevalent in the Gupta age, was responsible for its sophisticated form later. Because of the energetic quality, Ḍākini etc. later became the presiding goddesses of *chakras* which are seats of vital energy.

The reference to *maṇḍala* form of worship in the Ganghadhar inscription points to the emergence of a sophisticated Tāntric ritual. Maṇḍala means a magic circle. It was a technique employed in various Tāntric practices, Brāhmaṇical as well as Buddhist. The *maṇḍala* represents psychic totality itself. It consists of the arrangement of circles and squares. These symbols represent the process of the realization of the self. The various gods or goddesses rule the different centres. By worshipping them one by one the devotee passes from one level of spiritual existence to another. To reach and surpass the seventh mother was to realize the final spiritual experience. Since spiritual life and natural life were regarded as functionings of the same psyche, the devotee transcended these levels of experience if he believed in the efficacy of his own will. Just as during the construction of the Vedic altars one transcended various levels of existence and constructed for himself an immortal being beyond death, similarly the *maṇḍala* method was the Tāntric rite signifying the same idea. In the process the *sādhaka* acquired various *siddhis* which included the acquisition of power over various elements and also material success. The devotee acquired wealth, victory, *siddhi*, and finally *mukti*. Hence this method freed the inner personality from its emotional and conceptual confusions and elevated the devotee to a transcendental plane, so that he could become a true 'whole' individual.

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[11] Banerjea, J.N., *Purāṇic and Tāntric Religion*, p.128f.

Another significant aspect of the Mātṛkā worship known from the Gangadhar inscription is that a worshipper of Vishṇu builds a temple in honour of the Divine Mothers. This is in keeping with the idea of *Durgā Saptaśatī* where Śakti is as much related to Vaishṇavism as to Śaivism showing remarkable syncretism. The Upanishadic idea of one power behind all the gods had always been in the background of the worship of many gods in India. The different Brāhmaṇical sects did not differ from each other in their basic religio-philosophic outlook and believed in the unity of different gods. This is seen beautifully in the philosophy behind the Saptamātṛkā worship which regards different Mātṛkās as *śaktis* of different gods and also identical with the Great Goddess. The Tāntric aspect of the Saptamātṛkās shows that a common religious ethos was created by the Tantras. Tantra was mostly a science of worship and its basic tenets included the efficacy of will, worship of female power, *maṇḍala* method of worship and the use of *mantras*. These were common to Śaktism and other cults.

26

Chinese Monks in India in the Gupta Age

Upendra Thakur

I

The foundations of the intercourse of culture and friendship between India and China were laid about two thousand years ago by our ancestors with infinite patience and sacrifice. A touch of that great stream of life sprang from the heart of India and overflowed across mountains and deserts into that distant land, fertilising the heart of its people. It reminds us of the great pilgrimage of those noble heroes who, for the sake of their faith and their ideal of the liberation of the self, risked life and accepted banishment from home and all that was familiar to them. Many perished and left no trace behind. "The two leading races of that age met, not as rivals on the battle-field, each claiming the right to be the sole tyrant on earth, but as noble friends, glorifying in their exchange of gifts."[1]

The actual historical facts concerning cultural interchange between the two countries are available only after the influx of Buddhism into China (67 A.D.). After this, great Indian sages and scholars went to China, and learned Chinese monks and travellers came to India in large numbers at different times. And it was they who carried on the real work of cultural exchanges through the medium of Buddhism. From the Chinese book, *Li-Tsi-Kao-Seng-Chuan (The Biographies of Great Monks in Various Ages)*, we know that two hundred Chinese monks studied in India and twenty-four Indian sages preached in China with great success[2]. As a matter of fact, there must have been many more monks and scholars who either perished on the way or disliked to leave their earthly names to posterity.

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[1] Tagore, Rabindranath, *Twenty Years of the Visvabharati Cheena Bhawana*, p.41; for details see Thakur, Upendra, *Some Aspects of Asian History and Culture*, pp.70ff.

[2] Thakur, Upendra, *op. cit.*, p.71.

II

From all accounts it seems that some of the Chinese monks probably came to India towards the end of the third century A.D. or in the beginning of the fourth century A.D. Yi-tsing (I-tsing) who visited India immediately after Hsüan Tsang (Yuang Chwang) in the seventh century A.D. informs us that twenty Chinese monks came to India in the middle of the third century by Yunnan-Burma overland route on pilgrimage. We are further told that king Śrī Gupta 'the founder of the Gupta dynasty, built a monastery near Bodhagayā (Buddha-Gayā) for the use of these monks.[3] This monastery was known as *Chīna-saṁghārāma* and the Chinese visitors to India made it a point to visit the ruins of this old monastery which was dedicated to the use of their fellow monks.

But it was from the end of the fourth century A.D. that the Chinese Buddhists began to take deep interest in India and Indian culture. Tao-ngan, a great Chinese scholar, was responsible for creating this interest in Indian culture. Though born in a Chinese family, "famous for its studies in the Chinese classics and its adherence to Confucianism",[4] Tao-ngan was greatly inclined towards Buddhism, and "got himself initiated to the Buddhist religion at an early age."[5] At Lo-Yang he studied Buddhist literature under the guidance of some very competent teachers and soon attained "a unique place in the Buddhist community in India. He brought together a number of best Chinese intellects, gave them perfect training in Buddhism and sent them to different parts of the country in order to preach the religion according to the strict laws of Buddhism".[6] Himself a great scholar and critic he was the first Buddhist monk in China to have critically examined the early Chinese translations of the Buddhist texts in China and "completed a series of commentaries in order to bring out the inner meaning of the Buddhist doctrines."[7] The earlier translations were mostly inaccurate and through his life-long work he obviated the difficulties in understanding the deeper sense of these texts. He was thus the first great Chinese Buddhist monk who created a new awakening in his country to study deeply the Buddhist culture by inviting a number of Indian scholars from Central Asia and compiling a book on India which greatly encouraged the Chinese monks to go to India and learn Buddhism at first hand. "As his disciples were found in all parts of China, he exercised through them a great influence on the Chinese Buddhist communities all over the country."[8] His efforts were not in vain because soon after his death in 385 A.D. a number of Chinese Buddhist scholars undertook the perilious journey to India to study the religion which had inspired them.

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[3] Bagchi, P.C., *India and China*, Bombay, 1950, p.60.

[4] *Ibid.*, p.60.

[5] *Ibid..*, p.61.

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] *Ibid.*

III

Of the eminent Chinese Buddhist missionaries who visited India, Fa-hien was the first to come during the reign of Chandragupta II, the great Gupta monarch (376-413 A.D.). He started his journey in 399 A.D. "with the avowed intention of collecting books of Buddhist discipline in India in order to remove the imperfections from which it was suffering within China".[9] In this endeavour he was accompanied by four other Chinese monks—Hiu-King, Tao-King, Hui-Ying and Hui-Wei. When they reached the frontiers of China, they met another party of monks who had also started for India on a similar mission. This party included Che-Yen, Hui-Kien, Seng-Shao, Pao-Yun and Seng-King. The two parties now proceeded together towards Central Asia and received official help at Tun-huang for their further journey.

Following the northern route upto Agnideśa (Karasahr), they proceeded right across the desert and reached Khotan. They had to encounter unparalleled sufferings on the way as their route from Khotan lay through the hills to Karghalik and Tash-Kurghan and then along difficult valleys and mountain passes to Kashmir and the neighbouring countries.[10] Thus, the route Fa-hien had followed till then was quite unfamiliar to the Chinese and the journey was so full of hazards that it could have discouraged any other traveller. "But the great ideal before him supplied the spiritual force that was needed for the fulfilment of his religious mission."[11] Fa-hien has expressed his experience in these moving words: "When I look back on what I have gone through, my heart is involuntarily moved, and the prespiration flows forth. That I encountered danger and trod the most perilous places, without thinking of, or sparing myself, was because I had a definite aim, and thought of nothing but to do my best in my simplicity and straight-forwardness. Thus it was that I exposed my life where death seemed inevitable, if I might accomplish but a thousandth part of what I hoped."[12] This was the great ideal which inspired all the Chinese pilgrims who came to India in later times.

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[8] *Ibid.*

[9] *Ibid.*, p.62.

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] *Ibid.*, p.64.

Fa-hien has left a detailed record of his visit to Central Asia and India which is a veritable mine of information regarding the state of Buddhism in these places. As we know, he was not at all interested in any other thing except Buddhist institutions and sacred Buddhist literature, specially the Buddhist code of discipline which was till then not available in China. His deep knowledge of Sanskrit evidently helped him to communicate with the Buddhist scholars of India with the result that he made voluminous translation of the disciplinary code of the *Mahāsāṁghikas*, one of the principal Buddhist schools of the day. India during this period was known in China as *Fu-kuo* (the country of the Buddha) and as such the account of his journey is known as *Fu-kuo-ki* (or *The Record of the Country of the Buddha*).[13]

The Buddhist monks who preceded him, collected a few scriptures from the north-western borderland and took with them Indian missionaries to preach Buddhism in China and translate Buddhist scriptures into Chinese; but they never visited the interior of India. Fa-hien was very much pained to find that most of the translations were imperfect and full of errors, and, therefore, he made it a point to collect such valuable manuscripts in India as were unknown in his own country. It was at this time that Kumārajīva, the great Buddhist scholar, was also invited to China by the Emperor to prepare correct versions of the scriptures with the assistance of 800 (eight hundred) Chinese priests, which we have already discussed in detail elsewhere.[14]

All that we know of Fa-hien ("Illustrious Master of the Law") is gathered from his own record of his travels. The accounts given about him in the *Memoirs of Eminent Monks* (compiled in A.D. 519) and the *Memoirs of Marvellous Monks*, compiled by the third emperor of the Ming dynasty (A.D. 1403-1424) are similar. Born in Wuyang in Ping-Yang he entered the order at the age of 10 (ten), and soon after took on him the obligation of the full Buddhist order and undertook his journey to India at the age of 25 in search of the complete copies of the *Vinaya-Piṭaka.*[15] Crossing the Tsung-ling mountains he entered India by north-western land-route and reached Udyāna passing through Gandhāra, Takshaśilā and Purushapura (modern Peshawar) which in those days formed the Swāt region. In all these places Buddhism (Hīnayāna) was in a very flourishing condition where he saw the foot-prints and alms-bowl of the Buddha. In the Hiddā Vihāra (Jalalabad) he came across the relic of the skull-bone of the Buddha which was kept with great care along with some other relics. He then visited Mathurā, Sāṅkāśya, Kānyakubja, Kosala, Śrāvastī, Kapilavastu, Pāṭaliputra, Nālandā, Rājagṛha, Gayā(Bodhgayā), Vārāṇasī, Champā, Tāmralipti, Ceylon (Śrī-Laṅkā) and other places and finally returned to China by the sea route in 414 A.D. He went to the capital of his country (Nan-king) alongwith another *śramaṇa* Buddhabhadra, translated some of the works he had obtained in India and "before he had done all that he wished to do, he moved to King Kow (in the present Hoopih) and died at the monastery of Sin, at the age of eighty-eight, to the great sorrow of all who knew him."[16]

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[12] Quoted, *ibid*.

[13] *Ibid*., p.64

[14] Thakur, U., *Some Aspects of Asian History and Culture*, pp.60-64.

Fa-hien has presented a scintillating account of the places he visited and his observations about the state of Buddhism prevailing in India in those days are thought-provoking, pointing to the change in the form of Buddhism current in India, and its tendency towards borrowing ideas from Brāhmaṇism (Hinduism) which is evident from his description of the annual procession of images including that of the Buddha, in Pāṭaliputra and its adjoining areas.

These descriptions apart, the main purpose of his visit to India, as noted above, was to collect the copies of the *Vinaya Piṭaka.* As the tradition in India since the Vedic times was to transmit the rules orally from preceptor to disciple it was difficult for him to procure a copy of that great Buddhist canon. Only when he came to Madhyadeśa he could obtain a copy of the *Piṭaka* in a Mahāyāna monastery at Pāṭaliputra, the capital seat of Chandragupta II, which contained the rules used by the Mahāsāṁghikas and also an account of the First Buddhist Council. According to the Buddhist tradition, this copy of the *Vinaya Piṭaka* originally belonged to the Jetavana *Vihāra.*[17]

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[15] Legge, James, *The Travels of Fa-hien*, Delhi, 1971, p.2.

[16] *Ibid.*, p.2. For details of his visit to various places in India, see *ibid.*, Chaps.I-XXXIX; Thakur, U., *op. cit.*, pp.71ff.

[17] *Ibid.*, p.72.

The Buddhist order, as we know, had eighteen schools, and all of them had their own versions of the *Vinaya*. Though they agreed in general principles they, however, differed on minor details. But the copy of the *Vinaya* that Fa-hien procured is said to have been the most complete version with correct interpretations and explanations. He also obtained a transcript of the rules containing seven hundred *gāthās* or *ślokas* of the Sarvāstivādin school, which had also been transmitted from generation to generation orally without ever being put down in black and white. Besides these, he also procured a collection of the *sūtras* of twenty-five hundred *ślokas*, and enlarged volume of the *Parinirvāṇa-vaipulya-sūtra* containing five thousand *ślokas* and also a copy of the *Abhidharma* of the Mahāsāṁghikas. Fa-hien stayed at Pāṭaliputra for full three years to learn Sanskrit language thoroughly in order to collect, copy and interpret these valuable texts into the Chinese language.[18]

The sea-port of Tāmralipati was yet another flourishing centre of Buddhism with twenty-four, *saṁghārāmas* and numerous devotees. Fa-hien lived here for two years to copy sacred books (to write out his *sūtras*) and draw pictures of the Buddha images.[19] In fact, he did not travel much in the southern parts of India. His description of a rock-cut monastery of Kaśyapa Buddha in the Deccan having five-storeyed edifice and numerous chambers does not tally with any of the existing rock-cut monasteries of the Deccan. He was probably referring to the multi-storeyed rock-cut *Vihāras* of Ellora which he could not visit personally.

It was from Tāmralipti that he left for Śrī Laṅkā on a large merchant vessel and went floating over the sea to the south-west. He reached Ceylon after fourteen days. He spent two years in the monasteries of Ceylon, listened to the lectures of eminent Buddhist teachers and copied manuscripts of many texts. There also he procured a copy of the *Vinaya Piṭaka* (of the Mahīśāsaka School), the *Dīrghāgama*, the *Saṁyuktāgama* (*Sūtras*) and the *Saṁyukta-sañchaya-piṭaka*,[20] which were not known in his native land.

After passing two years in Ceylon he started for his homeland on a large merchantship. He has given a vivid description of his perilous voyage. "The stormy sea, a leakage in their ship and other difficulties hampered his journey and he arrived in Java after spending ninety days on the sea. The dominant religion of Java was Brāhmaṇism; Buddhism had little following there. He, therefore, did not stay in Java for long and again embarked on a merchantship bound for the Chinese ports. He again encountered much difficulty on the way. Besides the hostile attitude of the Brāhmaṇas, his co-passengers on the ship, he had also to face the vagaries of nature. The ship was led astray by tempestuous wind and Fa-hien had to land in Shan-tung, far away from his destination,[21] Thence he proceeded to Nanking where he completed the translation of the works he had obtained in India with great labour and devotion.[22]

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[18] *Ibid.*, p.72.

[19] Legge, *op. cit.*, p.100.

[20] *Nanjio*, 1132, 545 and 504.

Pao-Yun was the only monk among the companions of Fa-hien about whom we have some information in the Chinese annals. He had undertaken the journey independently and started from China a little earlier in 397 A.D. He met Fa-hien and his party on the way to Central Aisa, and after that he accompanied him throughout the long journey. While in India he studied Sanskrit and translated a number of Buddhist texts into Chinese after his return to China. He also compiled an account of his travels, known as *Ki-yu-li-wai-kuo-chauan* which is now unfortunately lost.[23]

IV

Fa-hien and Pao-yun were soon followed by Che-mong, another enterprising Chinese monk from Chang-ngan in 404 A.D. with a party consisting of fourteen other Chinese monks. He visited Shen-shen (near Lob-nor), Kiu-tse (Kuei), and Yu-tien (Khotan). They went south-west from Khotan and facing a perilous journey over the Pamirs reached Bolor near Kashmir. "The ascent of the Pamirs was so difficult that nine of his companions did not continue their journey and went back to China. An Indian monk, who was probably acting as guide died of fatigue. But, Che-mong was firm in his determination and he continued his journey along with his remaining four companions, and after crossing the Indus reached Kashmir. He visited almost all the holy Buddhist places in northern India such as Kapilavastu and Kusumapura (Pāṭaliputra or Patna) and collected Buddhist texts for carrying them back to his country. He returned to China in 424 A.D. by the same route through which he had come. On the way back, three of his four colleagues died. He also compiled a detailed account of his travels in India and Central Asia, but unfortunately it is now lost.[24]

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[21] Bagchi, P.C., *op. cit.*, p.63.

[22] Thakur, Upendra, *op. cit.*, p.73

[23] Bagchi, P.C., *op. cit.*, p.65.

In 420 A.D. another batch of twenty-five Chinese monks led by Fa-yong started for India following the northern overland route of Central Asia through Turfan, Kucha and Kashgar, and then over the Pamirs and along the Gilgit valley upto Kashmir where they spent more than one year to study Sanskrit and the Buddhist texts. From there Fa-Yong went to visit all the important Buddhist places in northern India as far as Bengal and then returned to China by the sea-route. He also wrote a memoir recording the details of his journey but that too is lost.[25]

The other Chinese monks who visited India during this period were Tao-pu, Fa-sheng, Fa-wei, Tao-yo and Tao-t'ai. It was by an imperial decree that Tao-pu had to proceed to India in search of Buddhist texts. He was also accompanied by ten scribes to help him to prepare copies of the texts. He could not reach India as the ship by which he was travelling met with an accident on the high sea. Fa-sheng, a contemporary of Tao-pu, had also been to Buddhist countries in the west and compiled a memoir of his visit. As this memoir is now lost, we are not in a position to give an account of his visit to India. Tao-yo was the only monk to have visited India between A.D. 424 and A.D. 451. He came as far as Sāṅkāśya, a place near modern Thanesar. The account of the journey recorded by him is lost.[26]

None of the Chinese monks who visited India after Fa-hien could attain his reputation. But there is no doubt that they were all inspired by the same noble ideal of gaining knowledge of Buddhism at first hand and taking back home as many authentic Buddhist texts as possible. "The acquisition of merit by visiting the sacred places of Buddhism in India was also an ulterior motive."[27] Undertaking perilous journey many of these noble souls died on the way or returned to China as they could not stand the fatigue and rigours of journey. Some did defy all the odds on the way and fulfilled their mission without any official backing whatsoever.

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[24] *Ibid.*

[25] *Ibid.*, p.66.

[26] *Ibid.*

[27] *Ibid.*

V

But, the work of these travellers was not in vain as they succeeded in impressing the emperors of China about the necessity of sending Buddhist scholars to India. It was in pursuit of this mission that Sung-Yun (Song-Yun) was sent to India on an official mission, accompanied by a Buddhist monk, Hui-sheng.

Sung-Yun was the last great Buddhist traveller who visited India in the Gupta age. He was a native of Tun-Wang, and while in Lo-Yang was asked by the Empress of the Wei dynasty to go to India (A.D. 518) to offer on her behalf presents to the Buddhist sacred places and bring Buddhist scriptures to China.[28]

The Chinese sources give us the following details regarding the visit of Sung-Yun. "Towards the beginning of the sixth century A.D. (A.D. 518) an empress of the Wei dynasty sent an official mission to India to offer present to the Buddhist sanctuaries and bring Buddhist texts from India. The official envoy was one Song-Yun...his companions followed the southern route of Central Asia-Sẖen-shen (near Lobnor), Tso-mo (Chalmadana, modern Cherchen) and Khotan...to Karghalik, Wakhan and Chitral...the Valleys of Yasin and Gilgit...and Bolar to the north-west of Kashmir. The visit of Song-Yun was restricted to north-west of India, especially to Uḍḍiyāna (the Swāt Valley) and Gandhāra (Peshawar). Song-Yun returned to China in A.D. 522 and compiled an acccount of his journey which is now lost."[29]

But the portions of his the account of Sung-Yun's journey[30] survive in fragmentary quotations given by later writers and his account of Uḍḍiyāna has been translated by Chavannes and others.[31] The story of Gandhāra is specially interesting as it is an eye-witness account of events. According to him, the king of the country (Mihirakula) did not believe in the Law of the Buddha but loved to worship demons.[32]

Accompanied by Hui-Seng, Sung-yun did not visit the interior of India, but went to the north-west border-lands through Central Asia, and stayed there for three years visiting all the places associated with the hallowed memories of the great Lord. Having collected one hundred and seventy-five volumes of Buddhist scriptures he returned to

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[28] Thakur, Upendra, *Some Aspects of Asian History and Culture*, p.73.

[29] Bagchi, P.C., *op. cit.*, p.74; Thakur, Upendra, *The Hūṇas in India*, p.148.

[30] *BEFEO*, 1903.

[31] Beal, S., *Records of the Western World*, Vol.I, pp.xxiv ff.

[32] For details see, Thakur, *op. cit.*, p.149.

China in 522 A.D. He is also said to have paid respect to the remains of Boddhidharma,[33] the great Indian Buddhist monk.

Sung-Yun has given a very faithful description of the condition of Buddhism obtaining in those parts of India during the period of his visit. According to him, Buddhism had "become corrupt by the introduction into its code of the practice of magical art."[34] The original Buddhist system never envisaged use of charms and magical powers. To begin with, Buddhist teachings were connected with morals but, a few centuries after, the simple doctrine was corrupted and fantastic stories and superstitious legends came to be woven round the sytem by vested interests who wanted to please the people and increase the power of the priests, especially "among the Tartar tribes who, like all northern races, were given to superstitions."[35] The result was that several sincere and genuine priests were put to death. While giving the account of the leader of these magic-hungry people, Sung-Yun says that he "used wild magic to win followers, taught to dissolve all ties of kindred, and aimed only at murder and disturbance."[36] This was indeed a tragic state of Buddhism in these parts of the country "the like of which we do not come across anywhere else."[37]

We do not hear of any activities of the Chinese pilgrims after this for nearly three quarters of a century. After the fall of the Wei dynasty in 535 A.D. the new rulers of China did not take much interest in Buddhism. We have no information about any official attempt to sent Buddhist scholars to India nor was there any individual effort on the part of the individual Chinese monks to maintain the relations already established between the two countries for nearly a hundred years during the Gupta period. The Indian monks no doubt came to China as usual in this period also but after their return they did not receive the warm reception at the Chinese court as they had received before. The period of inactivity, however, ended towards the close of the sixth century A.D. (586 A.D.) when, with the establishment of the Sui dynasty, far-reaching political changes took place in China.

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[34] Beal, S., *Fa-Hien*, Intro.

[35] *Ibid.*

[36] *Ibid.*

[37] For other details, see Thakur, U., *op. cit.*, Chap.II.